

RUHAINAH:

A STORY OF AFGHAN LIFE.

EVAN STANTON



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BY
EVAN STANTON

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DEDICATED
TO
"SISTER LYDIA."

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RUHAINAH.

CHAPTER I.

THE RUSTUM OF HERAT.

IT was in the autumn of 1859 that Dost Mohamed, the Ameer of Cabul, was enjoying some degree of repose in the beautiful winter gardens outside the dismantled walls of Jalāl-abād.

The arrival of the great Ameer, with his numerous retinue and extensive seraglio, was an occasion of great excitement in the little town, and its quaint bazar was crowded with motley groups of visitors from far and near.

Tribesmen from all parts of the neighboring hills came to pay their respects to that popular Ameer, who in spite of British conquests, had succeeded in establishing the inde-

pendence of his country and the stability of his dynasty.

The Ameer's encampment presented a most picturesque spectacle. That strange admixture of glory, grandeur, and dirt which so characterizes everything in the bright but weary East.

The garden in which the camp was placed was enclosed by a high brick wall, and in the centre of the quadrangle were two chaste white marble cisterns into which played fountains of pure water brought from the Cabul River. Majestic cypresses formed stately groves stretching from the fountains to the entrance gates, while trellised vines encircled the spacious area within the gloomy brick walls, and several large spreading peepal trees afforded that shade which is so restful and refreshing in a parched and sunny clime.

It was under one of these large shady peepals that rich Persian carpets were spread on a raised dais, where every morning the ruler of the Afghans, for some three hours, received embassies from tributary tribes, heard appeals, and administered summary justice, very much

in the same way as it had been done in these historic regions centuries ago.

The Afghan Ameer, clothed in white flowing robes and wearing a massive white turban on his head, sat crossed-legged on a rich carpet and gracefully reclined on a large silken cushion over which was thrown a costly Cashmere shawl.

Behind the Ameer stood the erect form of a faithful attendant, with a long dagger in his belt, who with a bright cotton handkerchief brushed away the flies, while a fair youth, a slave-boy from Kafiristan, occasionally handed his master a cup of sandal sherbet, and an old Abyssinian bond-servant supplied at intervals the calumet of peace.

Seated on the Ameer's right was Shere Aly, the recently nominated heir to the throne, a surviving son of a favorite wife, and who, in after years, played so important a part in Afghan history. Close by stood the portly figure of Shergāsi, the Lord Chamberlain, whose countenance betrayed the fact that his good humor and courtly manners were fortified and sustained by libations such as were not consistent with a

true follower of the Prophet. But the Lord Chamberlain had often been heard to say that had sparkling champagne ever existed in the days of the Prophet it would have been made lawful, being so much more grateful to the human soul than scents and women which were the Prophet's foibles.

A marked contrast to the well-conditioned appearance of the Lord Chamberlain was the gloomy countenance of the Ameer's trusted adviser who occupied the left of the throne and who sat in pious abstraction counting the ninety-nine names of God on his rosary. Afghan rulers love to do religion by deputy. The next best thing to being religious is to support and pamper a religious devotee. So thought the great Ameer. And the orthodoxy and bigotry of the saintly Fazlodeen served as a counterpoise to the erratic counsels of the wine-bibbing Shergasi.

In the background stood some twenty armed retainers selected from the various tribes and held as hostages for the good behavior of their respective clans.

The strongly marked Jewish features of the

Ameer—for the Afghans by their own genealogies are descended from King Saul—were evident as he took chief part in the discussions of the durbār.

It is true the ameers of Cabul have autocratic power, but Dost Mohamed had introduced a kind of constitutional government, and consequently in the durbar, besides those already mentioned, were several *sardārs* or nobles of distinction, whose advice was sought on all great state questions.

Among these privileged courtiers there was none more honored and trusted than Abdullah, an old white-bearded chieftain, known as the "Rustum of Herāt."

Abdullah was an Afghan noble who in his youth had migrated from Herat to Cabul, and who had been a trusted adherent of the Ameer's cause during the British invasion.

After the expulsion of the British he had returned to his own province, and had served the national interests of his country during the Persian invasion of Herat.

"Rustum" is a mythical personage in Oriental romance, celebrated for his unbounded

hospitality; and such had been the generous and benevolent character of Abdullah, during his eventful life, that he had earned for himself the honorable distinction of "The Rustum of Herat."

There had not been any notable event in the life of the Ameer with which this chieftain had not been associated, and rumor had it that this Abdullah had done many a dark deed of blood.

But "God and the Prophet knew best." Abdullah's vices were all in the uncertain chaos of men's minds, while his virtues were evident to the world. To look at him you would have said Abdullah was a good man, good as Afghans go, which, after all, is not saying much for Abdullah's character.

His was a tall well-built figure with a soldier-like bearing, a fine open face with arched eyebrows, so marked a feature in Afghan countenances. His eyes had a soft and kind expression which seemed to belie his reputation as a desperate man. His beard was long and perfectly white, and his whole appearance would prove him to have attained the patriarchal age of three score years and ten.

Abdullah was a man of simple habits, and even when he attended the durbar of the Ameer he seldom added any thing to his ordinary white cotton turban, coat and pijāmahs, save an Egyptian cimeter which he had so often wielded in the national cause. The full turban, some twenty yards in length, which encircled his head, was bound round a conical cap of rich Persian gold lace. His wide loose pijamahs of white cotton cloth were covered to the knee by a simple white *kurta*, such as is worn by an Afghan yeoman.

When unarmed and pursuing the peaceful occupations of his village life Abdullah carried in his hand a long staff which added to his patriarchal character, but when he attended the councils of kings he buckled on his trusted sword and stepped as with the elasticity of youth, for in Afghanistan the old feel youthful in the service of the state.

Abdullah entered the durbar and walked with a firm step up the center to the raised dais, on which the Ameer was seated. The whole company rose, as the Ameer advanced to welcome the old man, whom he embraced with

the greatest cordiality and with the warmest affection.

“ Friend Abdullah !” said the Ameer, “ it is our intention to reward you for your faithful adherence to the interests of our person and our dynasty, by making you a free grant of the village and fort you now occupy.”

Requesting Abdullah to be seated, the Ameer in an authoritative voice ordered his secretary to read aloud the deed of gift which declared that “ in consideration of the eminent services rendered to the state, that faithful Moslem and well trusted servant, Abdullah of Herat, shall receive for the use and enjoyment of himself and his heirs forever the village and fort of Abukilla in the province of Jalalabad.”

The document having been read, the Ameer affixed his signet on the top of the manuscript and handed it to the venerable chieftain.

As the Ameer thus made over the old historic fort of Abukilla to the stranger from Herat, a vindictive smile stole upon the lips of the Sheenwāree chieftains which but too truly indicated the feelings of jealousy with which

they regarded the settling of strangers in Sheenwaree territory.

Even the ascetic countenance of old Fazlo-deen relaxed its muscles as he raised his eyes and looking at Abdullah recited in a whisper the well-known couplet:—

“Thou hast piled up trays of various meats,
Nor wilt thou with a single platter rest content.”

* * * * *

The domain thus granted by the Ameer of Cabul to Abdullah of Herat was the pretty little village of Abukilla and its old fort.

Abukilla lay nestling on one of the slopes of the lower mountain ranges which rise from the valley watered by the Cabul River. The village consisted of some seventy dwelling houses surrounded by a dilapidated mud wall; and a small stone fort, said to have been erected by the Emperor Baber, occupied the side of the village exposed to the valley below. The stone watch-tower, which rose higher than the fort, could be seen peeping through the trees at a considerable distance, and the two lofty minarets of the old ruined mosque gave an antiquated and picturesque appearance to the place.

Abukilla, being about seven miles from the great highway from central Asia to India, had escaped the ravages of conquerors ; but having changed proprietors with the expiration of every reigning dynasty, the village, its fort, its watch-tower, and its mosque, had sadly fallen into decay.

The hospitality of the “Rustum of Herat” had, however, made it a place of resort, and although Abdullah had but recently occupied the place, weary and needy travellers would often stop short of the town of Jalalabad, and turn aside from the public highway, to find a peaceful halting-place and a hospitable welcome in this secluded village.

Among the Afghans hospitality is the very bond of perfectness. And the open-handed and generous treatment of all who visited the fort had secured for its new chieftain a world-wide reputation which even those who regarded him as an intruder could not gainsay.

The chief institution of the village was its mosque, which had been erected by the Emperor Baber as a thank-offering for journeying mercies, and which still possessed some

traces of its original beauty, and enjoyed a very considerable endowment.

The mosque combined in itself the three-fold character of a hostel, a divinity school, and a house of prayer. Its lay-patron was the chief of the village, and in order to secure the religious interests of the place Abdullah had forcibly ejected the former incumbent, and had installed an Afghan scholar and poet of reputation known as "Mullah Ahmad."

Mullah Ahmad was a many-sided man ; well read in ponderous folios of tradition, and well skilled in theology, logic, and philosophy. But he was chiefly known as a poet. To the chieftain of Abukilla the special recommendation in Mullah Ahmad's character was the fact that he was more genial in manner and more liberal in thought than that bigoted specimen of humanity who usually occupies the position of village priest in Moslem countries.

There were in connection with the mosque a number of divinity students, chiefly supported by the liberality of Abdullah, and partly from the endowments of the institution.

Mullah Ahmad was most regular in the observ-

ance of the five stated periods of liturgical prayer, and so zealous was he in religious matters, and so undisputed was his authority in things spiritual, that he sometimes applied the leathern whip to the backs of those who grew weary in their devotional duties. Ahmad used to say, for he had a sense of humor, that he found this one of the most wholesome injunctions of the Prophet, so much more effectual in rousing sluggish souls than even the most fervent sermons.

The only other institution in this little village was the Hindu's shop. The Afghans never keep shop. In all Afghan villages there are Hindu shop-keepers. Idolater though he be, the Hindu is tolerated by the Moslem Afghan as a being absolutely necessary for his existence. But oftentimes when the Afghan chief has run up a heavy bill at the Hindu's store, he will clear off the bill by clearing off the shop-keeper.

The Hindu shop-keeper of Abukilla was a tall, thin emaciated specimen of humanity named Nand Rām.

Any morning as the traveller passed from

the fort to the mosque he might see Nand Ram seated at the door of his little shop encased in piles of sugar, dried fruits, salt, flour, rice, and butter, weighing out articles of food, and measuring off calico to the boys and girls, and the good wives of the village.

But although Nand Ram was in Afghan eyes an insignificant idolater only allowed by a merciful Providence to live for the accommodation of the faithful, he was by no means an unimportant personage. He was a paid spy of the British Government, and the special correspondent of the London *Times*.

Nand Ram was a well paid political spy, and every week he transmitted his despatches sewn up in the sole of the shoe of a native runner. He had formerly resided in Cabul, but he had been ejected from that city on suspicion, and he had now settled in this obscure place so as to get his political information and Cabul news through the female members of Abdullah's family.

Close to the Hindu's shop was the entrance to the fort in which resided the famous chieftain. A wooden door opened upon a large

quadrangle, where everything betokened a hospitable welcome. Along either side of the open space were picketed some twenty horses, being a detachment of cavalry kept up by the chief of Abukilla in accordance with the Ameer's feudal system for the service of the state.

Facing the entrance, and within the fort, were several large rooms used as guest-chambers, fitted up with cots which were every evening supplied with quilts and pillows for the weary traveller.

This *hujrah*, or guest-chamber, is an institution common to every Afghan village. Here every stranger can claim an evening meal and a night's sojourn.

Above the guest-house was a *bālahāna*, or upper-chamber, in which the chief and his special guests usually sat. The wooden shutters of this apartment opening the whole length of the room gave the occupants the benefit of the sun on a winter's day, and of the cool breezes from the river below on a sultry night.

Beneath the guest-houses was a large subterranean chamber, known as a *tahkhānah*, where

the chief and his family found a cool retreat from the intense heat of a summer's day.

The entrance to the *harem*, or prohibited quarter, was in the corner of the outer court, but so screened off as to prevent the eye of the curious from penetrating its hidden mysteries. As the owners of Abukilla had generally kept up the orthodox number of four wives, with a numerous company of female slaves, the zenana apartments of the fort were unusually extensive. Each wife having a separate establishment of servants and slaves.

The harem of an Afghan chief is generally held sacred from the prying curiosity of the outer-world, but there were circumstances connected with the female portion of Abdullah's household which had become the subject of village gossip. Abdullah himself was regarded as an intruder, but there were circumstances connected with the interior economy of his household which had become a grave public scandal, even among people whose lines of domestic morality are drawn as wide as those of the Afghān race.

CHAPTER II.

RUHAINAH.

THE new chieftain of Abukilla was over much married. Not that the "Rustum of Herat" had been a gay Lothario, but, like Jacob of old, he had been the victim of circumstances.

When a young man, his father had betrothed him to the daughter of a Cabul priest, by whom he had several children, the only surviving child being his son Alak. Then, a few years afterward, he made it a point of honor to espouse the widow of a Sadozie chief whom he had slain in battle. By her he had no family.

And when resident in Herat, in order to conciliate the people of the city, he had taken to wife a lady of that province, by whom he had a daughter named Shaidy.

And now, in his old age, he had been compelled to complete the legal number, for no

sooner had he settled down in his new domain, than the Sheenwaree tribe had forced him to form an alliance with the family of their own chief.

Abdullah being an old man, with a well-stocked harem, would most gladly have escaped the responsibility of a fourth wife. But among Oriental races a marriage is considered one of the easiest ways of settling political difficulties. For the Prophet himself said "Matrimonial alliances between tribes increase friendship more than anything else."

The bonds-maids of Abdullah's household were also numerous. And even since his arrival in his new home, the Ameer had presented him with a fair damsel taken captive in a recent war with the idolaters of Kāfiristān. Among his numerous slave-girls the most active little busy-body was this Gulandāmah, a girl about twenty years of age, who made it her mission in life to relate the tittle-tattle of the harem. If any of the wives were invited to weddings Gulandamah accompanied them, and so carefully did she attend to her business, that by all the lovers of local gossip she was

regarded as a kind of court circular of the daily events of the harem.

From morning till night the continuous din and clatter of Abdullah's harem were such as to turn the strongest brain. It is true that each wife had her separate establishment, separate rooms and servants, and daily allowances of corn allotted at each harvest, and that Nand Ram, the village shop-keeper, kept a separate account with each for her supplies of groceries and confections. But, notwithstanding all this, there were ceaseless bickerings regarding the most petty matters, with which we will not trouble our reader.

In an Afghan household the mother of the chief takes the first place among the female members of the family. But Abdullah's mother had long been dead, and the Cabul wife claimed precedence, not so much on account of her seniority, but as the mother of the chief's only son. And the imperious spirit of Alak took very good care that his mother received due honor.

The Sadozie wife never really forgave the murder of her husband, and spent her time in

turning her spinning wheel in supreme indifference to the affairs of life.

The Heratee wife found some consolation in the sweet confiding love of her little daughter Shaidy.

But the real termagant of the household was the young Sheenwaree wife. From the very first she had regarded her marriage with the aged chieftain as merely a political expedient, and the whole energies of her little brain were spent in concocting mischief.

“What has a girl to do with the counsels of a nation?” is an Oriental proverb. But the beautiful Tāj at Agra erected by the Emperor Jehāngeer, and some of the most remarkable events in the lives of Oriental potentates, all prove that, in the East as much as in the West, women, especially when they are pretty, have exerted enormous power. Even at the very time of which we write the mother of Shere Aly was the leading influence in all state matters at the Cabul court.

With Abdullah’s young Sheenwaree wife mischief was her mission. And as her little fingers embroidered in gold, or spun at the spinning

wheel, or mixed dainty dishes for special guests,—each wife taking it in turn by the week to supply the guest-house,—her little brain was actively engaged with the one thought of obtaining paramount authority in the village and fort of Abukilla, and, if possible, in the counsels of the Ameer of Cabul himself.

Although six months of her married life had not passed, there was not a chieftain or prince in the whole country who had not heard of Nurejān, the young wife of the aged “Rustum of Herat.”

In all her intrigues Nurejan found a useful agent in the thin bony banker and shop-keeper Nand Ram. It is within the limits of Afghan propriety for a village lady to go outside her harem when veiled with a *bourka*, such as is common to Central Asia, and oftentimes a veiled figure was seen at the shop of Nand Ram purchasing cloth, sugar, candy and spice, and talking treason and love. All the village knew it was none other than Abdullah’s young wife. Poor Abdullah! You have purchased the friendship of the treacherous Sheenwarees at an enormous cost!

There was, however, one being in the harem who occupied an unique position. It was the eldest daughter of Abdullah, Ruhainah, who was known as "The Maid of Herat."

Born of a Cashmere slave, so it was said, she was only three months old when her mother died. She had, however, been tenderly cared for by Alak's mother and had been fortunate in gaining the affection of that wild son of the desert.

"Ruhainah!" Alak would say, "nothing but the inscrutable decrees of God could have made you and me brother and sister!"

"Yes, Alak!" the old father would say, "but even in the dark defile of the Khyber the wild flower clings to the rough and rugged rock."

It is impossible to conceive two characters more strangely contrasted than these two children.

Alak was the personification of an Afghan. A young man, some twenty-three years of age, of middle stature, with strong and active limbs, a quick but unsettled eye, and a strong impulsive nature. His dark eyes and black beard

seemed destined to effect a marked and striking contrast with the brown eyes and the rich deep auburn tresses of his fair sister.

Not even the fervid fancy of the Arabian Prophet had ever created a more graceful houri than this fair girl, who gave grace and elegance, and even peace, to the harem of Abdullah amid all its discordant elements. Even the Sheenwaree wife grew tame under the gentle and loving influence of Ruhainah's dreamy eyes.

Ruhainah was a child of nature. For hours she would sit gazing into the starry heavens and indulge in strange, dreamy thoughts of God. And as she stood, in the early morn, on the top of her dwelling, she would look down on the valley below, and watch the rapid flowing waters of the Cabul River with a deep yearning for some bliss supreme of which "time mocks the dream it never can destroy."

"You're a strange little creature," Alak used to say. "Why ever the Almighty sent you into this world of sin I cannot tell."

Ruhainah was only seventeen years of age, but she had for the last few years of her short

life exerted an influence over her aged father's life of which he was fully conscious.

Abdullah in his youth had been a desperate man, violent, fiery, and revengeful, but in the hands of his daughter Ruhainah he was as gentle as a lamb. Indeed, it was only in the apartment of Ruhainah that Abdullah found rest from the turmoils of life.

For an Afghan girl Ruhainah was well educated. She could read and write Persian and Pushto, and had studied carefully the poems of Hāfiz of Shiraz, and the Gulistān of Shaikh Sādi. She was well read in Afghan poetry, and could recite with readiness the odes of Rahmān.

Among strict Moslems the cultivation of music is unlawful, for it is said that the Prophet put his fingers in his ears when he heard the strains of a pipe.

"But that was not such music as Ruhainah's," old Abdullah would say. And the fond old father loved to recline and listen to the sweet strains of his daughter's melody as she would accompany herself on the *rebāb*.

How the old man's face would lighten up as he gazed on the pensive profile of his

daughter's face as she would sing so sweetly the words of the Arab poetess!

“O rare virtue and beautiful natural trait,
Which never will change by the change of estate!
When clad in his armor and prepared for the fray,
The army rejoiceth and winneth the day!”

“Father! why have you not married me to some old Cabul prince, or to some ugly Sheenwaree chief?” said Ruhainah, as she struck her little fingers playfully across the *rebab* and looked inquiringly into his face.

“My child, why do you ask me?”

“I never thought of it before,” she said; “but this morning your Sheenwaree wife said her tribe were determined to claim me in marriage for their chief.”

The old man's face became serious, and taking Ruhainah's hand tenderly, he said, very solemnly :

“Ruhainah, do you really wish to be married?”

“No, why should I?”

“Ruhainah! I once had a strange dream regarding you.”

“ Oh, do tell it, father ; I do so like dreams.”

“ It was many years ago—in fact, it was not long after your mother’s death,” said Abdullah, with some hesitancy, “ that I was sleeping at noonday under a shady rock in the Gandnamak Pass, and you, then a little babe, were resting in my arms, that Jesus, the Spirit of God—upon whom be peace—appeared to me and said, ‘ Abdullah ! that child is mine ; let her be as my Virgin Mother.’ I thought he took you away, but when I awoke you were playing with my beard. I have often wondered what could be the meaning of that dream ! Can it be that you are destined to live a virgin life ? For, many a time since then have I sought to betroth you, but the fate of the Almighty God seems against it. When a child, you were betrothed to the youngest son of the Governor of Herat, but he was assassinated that very night. I had promised you to a Candahar chief, and he was slain in battle. And it was only yesterday that I heard the Ameer had decided to demand you for his son Gholām Hyder, the very day the young prince died. It has been well said in the sacred

Korān, 'All things have been created after a fixed decree,' and your destiny, my rose, seems to be but to cheer and comfort an aged father at the close of his long and checkered life."

"And what more happy destiny than mine, father dear?" she said, as she playfully thrust her fingers into his long white beard and with her left hand struck a cheerful chord on the *rebab*.—"What happier lot than mine?"

"Sing another song, Ruhainah."

"Would you like the song of the seven wise women of Persia?"

"Yes."

"Well then you shall have it. And remember, you dear old saint, I inflict it on you because you have so cruelly brought me a *fourth* mother to annoy my poor little life."

And then taking her *rebab* she looked up into her father's face and sung:—

"Be that man's life immersed in gloom
Who weds more wives than *one*,
With *one* his cheeks retain their bloom,
His voice a cheerful tone.
These speak his honest heart at rest,
And he and she are always blest :

But when with *two* he seeks for joy,
Together they his soul annoy,
With *four* no sunbeam of delight
Can make his day of misery bright."

"You are quite right, you naughty Ruhainah !
But, my little rose, those seven wise women of
Persia knew nothing of Afghan politics. Even
the Prophet (upon whom be peace) married
eleven wives, but they were all marriages of
political expediency : so were mine."

"What ! did you not marry even my mother
for love ?"

"Peace, silence, my child ! your mother is
dead."

"Oh father ! *do* tell me something of my
mother, you never speak of her. And yet I
believe you loved her. You once said she was
fair and beautiful."

Abdullah was silent, as he always was when
Ruhainah mentioned her mother.

Ruhainah's influence in the harem was supreme, for her patient lovely nature often made her a messenger of peace. But yet when she wished to assert herself she could. It was only when Ruhainah's feelings were hurt or when

her orders were disobeyed that Abdullah troubled himself to interfere in household matters.

It is needless to add that Nurejan, the young Sheenwaree wife, hated Ruhainah with a bitter hatred. Such as only an Afghan woman can feel.

Meanwhile, the tittle-tattle of every household and the gossip of every guest-house was the fact that in the harem of an Afghan chief there was a fair and beautiful young maiden of seventeen both unmarried and unbetrothed.

Such a scandal, it was said, had never been known in the annals of the Afghan people.

It was this fact in the history of this young girl's life that made her a subject of general discussion in almost every Afghan family, and had earned for her the appellation of "The Maid of Herat."

CHAPTER III.

THE MOSQUE.

“COME to prayers! come to prayers! prayers are better than sleep!”

Thus in the early morn, as the first streak of light appeared in the heavens, the silvery voice of the village priest gave forth the call to prayer from the lofty minaret.

The mosque was soon the scene of animation. Devout villagers hastily risen from their cots came straggling in, and performing their ablutions, prepared for prayer.

The young students, still heavy with sluggish slumber, yawned upon their beds, and were only made conscious of their sacred duties by the stern and imperious call of their spiritual teacher.

“Yusuf! Shahbāz! Mohamed Gul! what are all you young fellows doing yawning on your beds when the voice of the Muazzan has given

the call to prayer? Shake off the embrace of Satan that beguiles your souls! Awake to the call of prayer, my sons!" cried Mullah Ahmad, the priest, as he visited the cells surrounding the courtyard of the mosque in which slumbered the students of divinity.

Slowly and reluctantly did the young men rise from their cots, and running to the well hastily purify themselves for prayer.

"It seems strange," said Yusuf, the priest's son, "that our Prophet established prayer at so early an hour."

"Silence!" said Shahbaz, "know ye not that the five periods of prayer are a merciful dispensation from the Almighty in answer to our Prophet's supplication. In the time of Moses the people prayed fifty times a day, and the disciples of Jesus prayed all night."

In the dim twilight of the early morn the stately figure of Abdullah was seen approaching the mosque, and the young students hastened their ablutions to receive the benignant blessing of their patron.

"The peace and mercy of God be upon you!" said Abdullah, as his servant unloosed

his sandals at the portal, and he crossed the threshold of the mosque, leaning upon his staff.

There was not a more devout Moslem than the "Rustum of Herat," for by a strict observance of the rites of the Moslem faith he sought to atone for the sins of his youth in the piety of old age.

Abdullah soon took his place in the turbaned congregation as they ranged themselves in five rows—for the angels delight in odd numbers.—The priest in front facing the sacred temple at distant Mecca led the people in prayer, as they prostrated themselves in humility and self-abasement on the cold earth.

All are equal in God's sight; and Abdullah the trusted counsellor of the Ameer bowed his head beside that of Akbar the household slave.

Prayers having been said, Abdullah remained on his knees in fervent supplication. Then taking a Koran handed to him by his slave, he read his morning portion from the sacred book:—

"Whosoever hath repented and hath done that which is right, he verily it is who turneth to God with a true conversion."

Having read thus far, the old man, with deep contrition of soul, raised the Koran to his lips and exclaimed, "O merciful God! I *have* repented. I did the deed in self-defence, but I *have* repented, and I have *tried* to do with her—yes, I have tried to do '*that which is right!*'"

Mullah Ahmad, the priest, hearing the earnest ejaculation of his chief, turned to him and said, "Do you require an explanation of the sacred text?"

"No," replied Abdullah, "the true meaning of *that* verse has long since been engraven on my heart! Tell me; is there *any* limit to the mercy of God?"

"None," said the teacher, "for hath not the Prophet himself said 'They truly sin who despair of the mercy of their Lord.'"

By this time the interior of the mosque had completely changed its character. From an assembly of devout worshippers it had become a village conclave. For the guests in the guest-house who had risen too late for early prayer strolled into the mosque to pay their respects to the learned priest.

Seated on a small mat near one of the pil-

lars of the mosque Mullah Ahmad received his visitors, who likewise seated themselves in a circle on the floor.

It was on these occasions that the village priest exercised his office of civil judge, or *kāzee*, and decided all questions affecting the social life of his people, according to the stern principles of Moslem law. Questions of marriage, and of divorce; family disputes; divisions of land; the payment of debts, both just and unjust, were among the thousand and one questions submitted to the good man for adjudication.

“*Zar, Zan, Zameen*,”—“gold, women, and land,”—Mullah Ahmad used to say, “are the three causes of all your troubles.”

And so they were. Although no one was more hen-pecked by his one wife—for the good man had never dared to take a second—or was more amenable to the potent influences of gold than the learned and pious priest. But as he accepted bribes from both parties and returned the money to the losing side no great injustice was done, while the coffers of the judge were much enriched.

The assembled group was a representative one of Afghan life.—

There was Faiyāz, the mystic from Persia, whose lean and ill-favored form told of stern devotion and severe penance. There was Fateh Khān, an old pensioner of the Indian army, who cut the throats of the infidel English at Ghuznee, but fought bravely for the very same race on the plains of Gujerāt. There was Afzal, a petty chieftain of a neighboring village, whose portly presence contrasted well with the lean man from Persia. Meerza was there, the village minstrel, who set the mystic verses of Mullah Ahmad to the unhallowed strains of the *rebab*. While in the centre of the group was the prominent figure of “Hasan the Khyberree,” one of the most desperate brigands of his day.

Abdullah having returned his Koran to a young student, who reverently wrapped it in a handkerchief of rich Bokhara silk, joined the party.

There were no legal disputes to be settled this morning, and the conversation of the little group was a general admixture of politics and religion. The designs of Russia—the British

occupation of Cabul—the intrigues of English officers—the coming of the Mahdee with black standards from the regions of Khorassan—the signs of the last days—the decay of faith among men—and the final victory of the armies of Islām, were a few of the various topics of conversation which occupied some two hours in the mosque at Abukilla.

“Now listen to me!”—said Hasan the Khyberree. “My policy is death to every infidel, be he English or Russian. ‘Fight the infidels wherever ye shall find them,’ are the words of the blessed Koran, and I believe that every hand stained with the blood of a foreigner shall appear with silver whiteness in the last day. Think of the glorious deeds of the faithful as they massacred to a man the proud conqueror. I can almost see the look of horror on the face of a pork-eating colonel as I plunged this dagger into his heart.” And as he spoke he drew his dagger from his belt in fiendish delight. “Ah! ah! Abdullah, the renowned and valiant chief of Abukilla! you have vastly changed, my friend, since I was your lieutenant in the Jagdalak pass! You had a tough struggle

with that young captain, and if I mistake not you still bear the mark of his pistol on your arm."

The young students of divinity watched the fanatical excitement of the brigand with intense delight, but it was but too evident that Abdullah listened to his words with manifest displeasure.

"Silence, Hasan!" said Abdullah, "this is not the time for thee to preach a *jehād*. There will come a day when the Caliph of Islam shall subdue the world. But these are those days of unbelief which are but the signs of the last age and of the approaching resurrection."

All eyes were suddenly turned to the side of the pillar where stood a tall thin man with a red beard and small blue eyes, and who spoke in idiomatic Persian, with a drawling intonation:

"It was only the other day that I was present at the durbar of our great Ameer, when he was discussing these questions, and his highness said that a united Afghanistan ought to be able to take its place among the nations of the earth. We Afghans are not a feeble race

like the Hindu, nor an expiring race like the Indian tribes of America, but we are a powerful and increasing people. Think of the glorious deeds of Mahmud, of Ghuznee and of Ahmad Shah! and still more recently of our own august master the Ameer! The Afghans are a nation of men, and why should they then despair of a great and glorious future? "

"Who is that man?" inquired the priest of Abdullah.

"He is a guest from Cabul."

"He has spoken the truth. He is a man of wisdom," said the priest.

The sudden appearance of a mounted warrior at the gate-way of the mosque interrupted the conversation.

"I bring a letter from the chief of Lālpura," said the horseman, as he handed it to Akbar the slave, who took it to his master.

Abdullah read the letter in silence but with suppressed excitement.

"Tell the horseman to ride to the guest-house, where he will get provender for his horse and a morning meal for himself."

Then, taking his staff, Abdullah left the

mosque and slowly and pensively wended his way to the fort.

“The chief has received some important intelligence,” said Hasan the Khyberee.

“A robbery!” said one.

“An abduction!” said another.

“A murder!” said another.

“*Zar, Zan, Zameen*,—gold, women, and land,” said Mullah Ahmad, “but whatever it is, the truth must soon be out.”

CHAPTER IV.

SWEET LITTLE SHAIDY.

“WHY do you look so sad, father?” said Ruhainah, as Abdullah entered the harem with an anxious countenance. “I wish we had never left Herat, for here we have nothing but trouble.”

“*Trouble!* My child, my troubles are indeed great, for as one of our own poets has said, ‘the Afghans are malevolent, ruthless, and contentious’.”

“Why all this sadness, father dear?” she said as she placed her hands on his, and looked up into his handsome face with undisguised anxiety. “Tell me your troubles. You did so in Herat. But in this dark hole there is not a ray of light even in your dear old face. Ever since your young wife came your manner has completely changed. My dear old father, cannot you tell me *all?*”

"*All*, my child! the *all* of my troubles would overwhelm a little brain like yours. You would not understand me if I told you."

"Try me, father. You have no idea how clever I am." And kneeling at his feet she coaxingly placed her head upon the old man's lap and with a pleading loving look raised her dreamy pensive eyes.

"Now, try me."

"Well, in the first place, the English and the Russians are giving the Ameer a great deal of trouble."

"That is nothing. Let England and Russia fight it out."

"Ruhainah, my life, you don't understand politics."

"Perhaps not. But tell me your next trouble."

"Well, then, the tribes are all jealous of my influence with the Ameer."

"Oh! that is of no consequence. I thought only women were jealous."

"Yes, my little rose, it is of consequence. For the hatred of an Afghan burns like fire. They may take my life."

“Father!” said Ruhainah much startled, “you must trust in God.”

“I do trust in Him. He is *Al-hāfiz*, the Protector. I do trust in Him,” said Abdullah in a subdued and thoughtful tone.

“Then what is your next difficulty, you dear old saint?”

“My next,” he said, placing his hand lovingly on her head and smoothing her long tresses. “My next, my greatest trouble is regarding *you*.”

(“It is all that young wife’s doings,” thought Ruhainah.)

“What trouble can *I* be to any one? You know, father, I have always obeyed your wishes.”

“Ruhainah!” he said in a solemn and measured tone, “Ruhainah! the Khān of Lālpura, the leading chief of the Mohmund tribe, demands you in marriage.”

“Well, and the Khan of Lalpura shall not have me.—How many wives has he?”

“Three, I believe.”

“And how many slave girls?”

“I do not know. Perhaps ten.”

“And how many children?”

“None.”

“Father! I will kill myself first.”

And loosing herself from his embrace Ruhainah stood erect before him and stamped her little foot with anger.

“Listen, father! the day that Ruhainah the daughter of Abdullah marries the chief of Lal-pura, with his three wives, and ten female slaves, that *very day* she plunges this dagger into her heart. Remember!”

And as Ruhainah spoke she seized her father's dagger from his belt and brandished it before him, while the astonished chieftain watched with alarm the excitement of his daughter.

Gently taking the dagger from her hand and replacing it in his belt, the old man said:

“Now listen, Ruhainah.”

“I will listen,” she said, as she took a little three legged stool and seated herself close to him.

“I am listening,” she added, as she placed her hand upon his knee, and looked lovingly in her father's face with tearful eyes.

“Among the Afghans it has ever been the custom for the closest bonds of friendship to be cemented by marriage. The Prophet (upon whom be peace) set us the example, and my marriages have always been contracted for this purpose. Ruhainah, my little pet ! I took my young Sheenwaree wife, not because an old man’s heart needs another love, but to strengthen my position with that powerful clan. And now, the leading chief of the Mohmund tribe swears eternal friendship if I will but give you to him in marriage.”

“Father ! one question : Did you marry my mother for love or politics ?”

“Your mother is dead. She died a long time ago, Ruhainah.”

Ruhainah felt her question had been evaded. But she allowed her father to proceed.

“My daughter ! I must tell you that this chief is supported in his demands by the whole country. For the people all say it is a disgrace to an Afghan family for a maiden of your age to remain unbetrothed. Still, I am told, that if you refuse, the chief will take your sister Shaily. The chief’s sole object, as I have told you,

being to form a close alliance with our family for tribal reasons."

"Poor Shaidy! No! Shaidy shall not be sacrificed for me!" Ruhainah exclaimed.

"We cannot resist the decrees of fate," said her father. "The chief expects an answer, and if all that Nand Ram says be true, the Khan of Lalpura will press his demands by satanic methods."

Abdullah buried his head in his hands and remained silent for some time. Then, springing from his seat he said with great decision, "Ruhainah! Shaidy *must* marry. The safety of our lives, the peace of our home, our position of influence among the people, all depend upon the step. Shaidy must marry the chief of Lalpura."

Ruhainah was lost in dreamland as her father took his staff and hurried into the outer court.

When she had recovered herself, she would fain have followed her father, but no female member of the chieftain's family was allowed to set foot in the village guest-house.

Ruhainah ran at once to her sister, whom she

found turning her spinning wheel in her mother's court-yard.

Gently approaching her sister, and placing her fair hand upon Shaidy's raven tresses she kissed her sister's forehead with tenderness and said, "My *poor* little Shaidy!"

"Why am I *poor*?"

"Why, my dear little dove, because you're going to be married!"

The sudden announcement did not astonish Shaidy in the least, for every Afghan girl is brought up with the expectation of getting married. And Shaidy's education had not been neglected in this respect by a careful mother. She knew well enough that when the time came she would have nothing whatever to say to the selection of her husband. "Our fathers and mothers know so much better than stupid children about so serious a question as matrimony," Shaidy had been taught to say.

Among Afghan girls love and matrimony are two distinct departments of social life. And although Shaidy's heart was already held captive by the only son of the village priest, she never for one single moment expected to marry

the youth she loved. To an Afghan girl marriage is not necessarily love.

“Married ! to whom am I to be married ? ”

“O Shaidy,” (taking her little sister’s hand), “you are going to be married to a perfect monster. To a great big ugly chief with three wives, and hundreds of slave-girls, and all simply because—the family of the chief of Lalpura must be united to that of the Rustum of Herat.”

“Well, if it is my fate I cannot resist it,” said Shaidy, as she resumed her spinning.

“Gulandamah ! have you ever heard of the Khan of Lalpura ? ” inquired Shaidy of the slave-girl who had just entered the court-yard.

Now, Gulandamah had already received sundry favors of the Mohmund chief, and she readily answered :—

“Why, the whole world knows him. He is a fine handsome young man, a good rider, a keen sportsman, a most hospitable host, and a brave warrior. It was his hand which slew the renowned brigand Secundar. Happy is the girl who marries Lateef Khan, the brave and hospitable chief of the Mohmunds. It is true,

he *had* four wives, and the religion of your Prophet does not allow a fifth, but when he heard of the charms of Shaily, the beautiful daughter of the Rustum of Herat—her long black tresses, her silken ringlets, her bright eyes, her ruby lips, her pearly teeth and her cypress form—why, he divorced the ugliest of his four wives, and now asks you to cheer his bereaved heart ! The chief is childless, and it is quite certain that from the very day you enter the house you will reign supreme. O Shaily ! you are a lucky girl. The luckiest in the country ! ”

And Gulandamah danced before her young mistress with delight.

“ But how did he ever hear of me ? ”

“ Why, through *me*, of course ! ”

For it is through such gad-about as Gulandamah that Afghan gentlemen become acquainted with the secrets of the harems of noble families. And at such business Gulandamah was an adept. It was in consideration of valuable presents to this slave-girl that the Khan of Lalpura had become fully informed of the harem-life of the new chief of Abukilla.

Gulandamah had told him of the mysterious maidenhood of Ruhainah, and she had also told him of the special charms of *sweet little Shaidy*, which in Gulandamah's eyes were far more attractive than those of the fair sister.

"There is not a man I like better in the whole country," said Gulandamah coquettishly. "Look here," she continued, pointing to a silver bracelet, "he gave me this, when I last visited his family with Alak's mother. Isn't it beautiful?"

"Gulandamah!" said Ruhainah, "it is very immodest, and very wrong of a young girl like you to accept presents from Afghan nobles."

"Ah! my sweet mistress, you forget that I am but a slave."

Ruhainah and Shaidy discussed for some time the proposed marriage, and the interests of the expectant bridegroom were well represented by Gulandamah in consideration of the silver bracelet. In the meantime, Abdullah had dismissed the messenger with a letter conveying his consent to the betrothal, and marriage.

"O Shaidy! you are indeed born under a lucky star," said Gulandamah. "The chief will

bedeck you with jewels, you will live on the choicest sweet-meats, you will rule those three wives with a rod of iron, you will have dozens of slaves to scold from morn till eve, you will recline on a couch of sweet perfumes, you will listen to the sweet strains of minstrels, and you will watch the lovely movements of Nautch girls ! O Shaily ! you are indeed lucky !”

“ But what will poor Yusuf say ? ” interposed Ruhainah.

CHAPTER V.

THE LOVE-SICK YUSUF.

“**P**OOOR Yusuf,” was the beardless youth who studied divinity, poetry, and law, at his father’s feet in the village mosque.

He first saw little Shaidy sleeping on the roof of her dwelling as he stood on the lofty minaret of the mosque giving the “call to prayer,” and from that moment his love for the girl had been one of those romantic hopeless passions which so often are the burden of an Eastern song.

Yusuf, who inherited his father’s poetic fancy, wrote whole folios of couplets expressive of his undying and unchanging passion for the chieftain’s daughter.

Her “moon-like face”—the “subtle dimple in her damask cheek”—his “burning breast kindled with passion’s flame”—the “enticing tavern of his mistress’ love”—the “nectar of

her ruby lips"—love's "inebriation"—the "curled circles of her raven locks," were all the subjects of poetic effusions which the love-sick boy assured his father were but Sufyistic expressions for love-divine, and which the fond parent regarded as evidences of the deep mystic piety which inspired his young son's soul.

The impassable barrier which Afghan propriety has raised between the outer world and a chieftain's harem would have separated forever these two young lovers, had they not enlisted the sympathies of a faithful friend in the indefatigable Gulandamah.

It was Gulandamah who conveyed sweet messages of love from the old ruined mosque to the well guarded precincts of the harem, and who skilfully arranged that Shaidy should loiter on the house-top at the very hour that the priest's son ascended the minaret to give the call to prayer.

Shaidy, like her sister, had learned to read the Afghan language, and often did Yusuf slip into the hand of the faithful slave girl impassioned verses in praise of the "cypress form," the "dark narcissus-like eye-lashes," the "slender

waist," and the "ruby lips," of the sweet little Shaidy, who had so enslaved his heart.

The sad news of Shaidy's betrothal to the Khan of Lalpura soon reached the ears of the priest's son, for it was the talk of the village. And most anxiously did the poor lad await the hour when Gulandamah would come with her empty pitcher to draw water from the well.

As the evening closed in, Gulandamah slowly emerged from the fort, clad in her blue striped pijamahs, and red kurta reaching to her knees, and with a dark green turban encircling her head on which was poised the empty pitcher.*

As Gulandamah approached the well, which was in the enclosure of the mosque, Yusuf drew near. Secretly did the trusty little slave slip into his hand a piece of pink paper. It was Shaidy's love letter. Not one word of her betrothal. It had but a couplet from an Afghan poet :

"In this world thou art my life, my soul,
Naught else beside. To thee my life I swear."

Slipping the paper into his lesson book he

read the lines by the dim light of his lamp as Gulandamah filled her pitcher.

“Can I speak to her?”

“Yes,” said Gulandamah.

“When?”

“When her father visits the mosque for night prayer.”

“How?”

“Take this,” she said, throwing at his feet a dirty white *bourka* or cotton veil, such as is worn by Moslem women. “Enter the fort and knock at the door of the harem. I will let you in. Speak not a word. But if you are discovered say you are Gulandamah’s lover. I will not betray you. Trust me.”

“Brave Gulandamah!” exclaimed Yusuf, as he put into her hand the only silver coin he possessed.

“Yusuf!” shouted the priest, who had just entered the mosque, “Yusuf, my son! Come here! It is not wise to waste precious moments in trifling conversation with slave-girls. For hath not the Prophet said that ‘the first sin which the children of Israel committed was on account of a woman’?”

Gulandamah leisurely filled her pitcher and returned to the fort.

“If I were a chieftain’s daughter I would marry Yusuf and live on love,” she said to herself as she tripped along the pathway.

“Will he come?” asked Shaidy, as Gulandamah entered the harem and placed her pitcher on the ground.

“Yes, and you must do exactly as I tell you or you will be found out and Yusuf will be killed. It is very stupid of you, my dear lady, to be so fond of this beardless youth. A brave warrior of prowess and renown is more worthy of the love of Shaidy the beautiful daughter of the Rustum of Herat.”

“But how will he enter the fort?”

“Now listen. At the time of night prayer, when the chief is in the mosque, Yusuf will enter disguised as a woman. You and Ruhainah must be seated on the roof. If he is discovered, you must say he is in love with me. A poor slave girl has no character to lose.”

The priest seldom commenced the public prayers until his chief arrived. But after a

few minutes delay the stately form of the venerable chief emerged from the fort and crossed the threshold of the mosque. He was soon standing in the row of worshippers absorbed in earnest devotion.

Every eye was fixed, as the Moslem law demands, in profound humility and self-abasement on the ground, as the musical voice of the priest gave forth the fomula :—

“ Praise be to God, the Lord of all the worlds,
The Compassionate, the Merciful !
King on the day of Judgment ;
Thee only do we worship !
To Thee do we cry for help !
Guide Thou us in the right way ! ”

Yusuf, taking advantage of the occasion so cleverly suggested by Gulandamah, covered himself with the bourka, and boldly entered the fort. Knocking at the door of the entrance to the harem, which was opened by the slave-girl, he was taken up the dark stair-case which led to the top of Ruhainah's dwelling. Here Yusuf found the two sisters seated on a Persian carpet, and reclining on richly embroidered

cushions. Ruhainah and Gulandamah withdrew and left the young lovers alone.

"It is all true!" said Yusuf, as he folded Shaidy in his arms. "It is all true!"

"What is true?" inquired Shaidy, as she rested her head on her young lover's shoulder.

"O Shaidy! only three nights ago I had a dream. I dreamed my sweet little dove which I feed and cherish in the mosque, was perched on the bow of the mulberry tree which overshadows the well, and that a great eagle came and carried my little dove away. O Shaidy! my life! my rose! *you* are the dove, and the chief of Lalpura is the eagle."

Shaidy raised her large black eyes and fixed them on Yusuf, and as she looked at him the bright starlight gave lustre to big tears which but too truly told the tale of a true but hopeless love.

"Shaidy!" said Yusuf, as he pressed her closely to him and wiped away her tears. "Shaidy! you must never marry that man. He does not love you. He has four wives already. And his mother is a proud Daurāni

of royal birth who will give you no peace. O Shaidy ! I love you with love divine. The poets have often sung of love. But there never has been love like mine. Only yesterday I was reading that a learned author says there are two kinds of love. Animal love and spiritual love. Spiritual love, he says, arises from harmony of souls. O Shaidy ! such is my love. Ours is like the love of Salāmān and Absāl, who, as they loved each other, lived in that beautiful island described by the poet Jāmi."

"Why, Yusuf, you talk like a philosopher. You will soon be as clever as your father. I know this much of love, Yusuf, that my whole heart is yours. I dream of you at night. I think of you as I turn my spinning-wheel. And as day after day I see you standing on the minaret and hear your voice giving the call to prayer, I long for eagles' wings. I wear as a charm against all evil your own dear name written exactly one hundred times on a piece of paper."

"Here it is," she said, as she held up to the starlight a bit of blue silk suspended from her neck, in which was sewn the precious talis-

man. "Never did Zulekha love her Yusuf as I love mine."

"But you will soon part with your love when you are wedded to a great chieftain," pleaded Yusuf. "And then the poor devotee who now worships at the shrine of your sweet self will wander in the desert of blighted hopes and sit lonely in the prison-house of despair."

"How stupidly you talk! If I marry the chief, and marry him I must, I shall never love him. No Afghan girl ever marries the man she loves."

"And yet you will be his, his wife, his slave," pleaded Yusuf. "O Shaidy, I am getting wild and mad. The day you marry him I will shoot either him, or you, or myself. No one who loves as I love could listen to your marriage music, and see you borne away to the home of another, and keep his reason."

"Don't talk so loud," said Gulandamah. "The chief is below."

"For heaven's sake, jump over the wall!" exclaimed Ruhainah, running to her sister and whispering to Yusuf. "Father is coming up the stairs!"

Gulandamah, who stood ready for the emergency, flung a rope over the wall, and Yusuf immediately let himself down to the lane below.

"What are you talking about?" said Abdullah, as he reached the top of the staircase somewhat out of breath.

"We were discussing Shaidy's marriage," replied Ruhainah.

"That must not be discussed, my children. In all such things you must follow the precepts of your elders. Girls do not understand such matters. They have always been arranged by your fathers, from the days of the Prophets; even from the day when Abraham the friend of God (upon whom be peace), chose a wife for his son Isaac."

Abdullah was soon followed by Shaidy's mother, a lady of Herat, with strongly marked Persian features, still bearing traces of former beauty.

"Shaidy!" said her mother, "your father and I have come to tell you of the auspicious arrangements we have made for your settlement in life. In a few weeks you will be the

wife of the leading Mohmund chieftain. He is related to the Ameer. He is a man of mighty deeds. He has slain with his own hand some fifty of his enemies. He is a swift horseman. He is expert in the public games. His hospitality is profuse. His guests are counted by hundreds. You are a fortunate girl. The alliance which you are about to form is one worthy of a princess of royal lineage. You are indeed fortunate."

"Have you ever seen him, mother?"

"No, my child, but Gulandamah has."

"Could not Shaidy see him *just once* before she marries him?" interposed Ruhainah.

"That is impossible. No family of reputation could allow such a thing."

"You are quite right, Begum," said Abdullah; "the truth is, that ever since those English came into these parts, our Afghan girls, having heard of the shameless way in which foreign women go abroad unveiled, are all claiming more liberty. Such innovations are but the signs of the last times and of the decay of faith among men."

"By Allah!" whispered Gulandamah to

Ruhainah, "that Sheenwaree wife of his goes about from place to place with the barefacedness of a common dancing girl."

Abdullah and his Heratee wife retired, and descended into the court-yard below, when poor little Shaidy threw herself on her cot in an agony of grief.

"O my God! what shall I do? Yusuf will kill himself, and I shall be held captive in the embraces of the man I hate."

When Yusuf, somewhat startled by his sudden descent into the road (for the rope broke), reached his father's mosque, he lighted his lamp, and like many a lover in a more civilized country devoted himself to the muses. After many vain attempts to produce something expressive of his feelings, he seized a reed pen and wrote upon the fly-leaf of a well worn copy of Euclid:—

"Narcissus-like I bend with grief,
Which haunts the hours of night and day;
A wound is mine without relief,
A life unchaste by faintest ray."

"Yusuf! Yusuf!" cried his father, "what are you doing?"

"I am trying to solve the fifth problem, but it's very difficult," replied the poor love-sick boy.

The next day Yusuf copied his lines on to a fine piece of Cashmere paper, and inscribed upon them—

"The Tribute of a Broken Heart!"

and awaited the arrival of Gulandamah at the well.

"Give this to Shaidy," he said. "I wrote it last night."

As Gulandamah entered the gateway of the fort, she was stopped by Akbar the slave.

"How dare you stop me?" exclaimed the enraged damsel.

"Don't be angry, my little maid," said Akbar. "I have important business."

"What is it?"

"There was a friend here yesterday who was making very minute inquiries after your mistress, the Fair Maid of Herat, and he said if the master does not give the young lady in marriage, a fire will soon be kindled in the peaceful home of the Rustum of Herat which

not all of the waters of the Indus shall quench."

"Well, and what business is this of mine?"

"None, my good little maid, but you might just give a word of warning to your fair mistress."

"I shall do nothing of the kind, friend Akbar. I am but a slave, and a slave is only half a woman. I do not believe in dangers which I do not see. But who, I should like to know, dares to take the name of my fair mistress upon his foul lips?"

"He is a noted brigand, who says he once met Ruhainah's mother. His name is Hasan—Hasan, the Khyberec, as he is called."

CHAPTER VI.

THE GUILD OF THE RED HAND.

THEY were a strange group—those five men, as they seated themselves around a blazing fire on the bare ground in that dark gloomy cave in the Khyber. They were incorporated members of the secret society known as the “*Guild of the Red Hand.*”

There was Alam, the youngest son of a leading Khyber chief. Young in years, but old in crime. He was known as the “Silvery Snake,” being singularly skilled in entering noiselessly and unobserved the houses of English officers in the military cantonment at Peshawur, and from which he often returned with enormous booty.

There was Baihrām, a ferret-eyed man of middle age, and short in stature, who had earned for himself the *sobriquet* of the “Tiger,” from his ability to pounce upon a defenceless

traveller and rob the unfortunate man of everything he possessed—this useful qualification making him a distinguished member of the little band.

There was Khawās, a tall, bony man, whose jaunting gait had secured for him the name of the “Camel,” and whose numerous scars told of many a desperate encounter.

There was “Solomon the Sage,” so called because his long face and ascetic exterior enabled him to defy detection when he assumed the *rôle* of a religious mendicant.

The fifth was “Hasan the Khyberee,” whom we first met in the mosque at Abukilla. Hasan was a truly desperate character. Consecrated to crime in his cradle, he had been trained as soon as he could walk in deeds of infamy and vice.

Hasan would often entertain his companions with stories of the skilful way in which his old father trained him to creep stealthily along the ground, or climb over a wall, or waylay unsuspecting strangers, and how his apt performances would be greeted with shouts of applause from admiring spectators, as his

proud parent exclaimed, "*Ghal shah!* Be a thief!"

The son, now a middle-aged man, of stalwart frame, with well-knit limbs and developed muscles, had become in every respect worthy of his disreputable parent.

"Only five of us to attack the whole military garrison of Peshawur," said Hasan, as he took long pulls at his pipe. "Where is Yunas?"

"Yunas?" replied Alam. "Yunas is saying his prayers in the Peshawur jail. He was caught with a metal spoon in his pocket, and, by the Prophet! it told more tales than even his broad Khyber dialect."

"Why do you fellows touch such things?" said Hasan, with anger. "Our holy guild is not formed for such trifles. Arab chargers, steel swords, pistols, and muskets, or costly uniforms, these find a ready sale at Cabul, and thus help on the cause of Islam. But where is Fateh?"

"Fateh?" replied Alam. "Fateh, poor fellow, is still suffering from his wounds, nursed with care in an English hospital."

"Strange creatures these English! One Englishman tried to kill Fateh, and now another Englishman saves Fateh's life. One infidel puts a bullet into Fateh's body, and another infidel takes the bullet out of Fateh's body. Truly, these infidels are strange beings."

"And Alak, the noble son of the saintly 'Rustum of Herat,' where is that young man?" inquired Hasan, with a sneer.

"Held captive with the tresses of his fair sister," said Khawas, with a fiendish laugh.

"*His sister!*" exclaimed Hasan, "*his sister!* By the Prophet, I could make a thorny pillow for the venerable head of the renowned Rustum of Herat, if it suited my purpose."

And Hasan stirred the fire with a demoniacal grin.

"Is the fair maiden still unbetrothed?" inquired Alam.

"She *is* still unbetrothed," said Hasan, with some emphasis. "And why that old fool does not give her to some young fellow I cannot tell."

"Solomon, my wise friend! wake up, you were almost asleep. Solomon, my sage coun-

seller! what say you to Hasan the Khyberee adding one other houri to his earthly paradise by taking to himself the Fair Maid of Herat?"

Solomon, taking out his snuff-box, put a quantity of the unlawful stimulant on the back of his hand, and snuffed it vigorously with the desired result.

"God be praised!" exclaimed the sage, as he nearly dislocated his neck with sneezing.

"May God have mercy on you!" piously ejaculated the other four.

Solomon's eyes expanded, and looking at Hasan, he said, "You were speaking of that young houri in Abdullah's harem. Be careful, my friend, for I am told that the young prince, Shere Aly, has set his heart on her. But night is coming on. We have no time for such idle talk."

Hasan motioned to Solomon to produce the book.

The whole five then arranged themselves in a circle, as Solomon uncovered a Koran, and placed it reverently on his knee.

"Now, brothers, *swear!*" said Hasan, as he raised the sacred book and kissed it. "*Swear!*"

“Death to the infidels. *Lubaikah!*”

And they each raised the right, hand and exhibited a red henna spot on the centre of the palm. (The spot on Hasan's hand was that of human blood.)

“*Lubaikah!*” repeated Hasan, and the whole company stood up. “God is most great!”

“*Ameen!*” answered the other four.

“*Allah Hafiz!* God is our protector!” said Hasan.

“*Ameen!*” replied the rest.

Thus had Hasan, who believed in neither God nor demon, made even the sacred offices of religion subservient to his own diabolical purposes. And his four trusty followers prepared themselves for a desperate deed of blood with all the religious enthusiasm of a band of martyrs.

It was in order to obtain a fresh supply of muskets for the Cabul market that Hasan had summoned the members of his desperate brotherhood to undertake a raid upon a cavalry picket at Peshawur. Being within a few miles of the Khyber Pass, the British cantonment at Peshawur is defended at night by pickets of

cavalry placed at short distances round the road which encircles the garrison.

One of the most important pickets was that stationed on the Khyber road, and which consisted of a small party of native horsemen, commanded by a non-commissioned officer. This native picket being within rifle-shot of a strong guard of British infantry, no attempt had ever been made upon it, but the very desperate character of the raid was a special attraction to a man of Hasan's temperament.

"These English think themselves very wide awake, but we will teach them that an Afghan is quite equal to them," said Hasan.

"Now our plan of attack is as follows," he continued:

"Outside the cavalry lines, facing the Khyber, is a picket of five mounted men. Each will possess a sword, a pistol, and a musket. Early in the morning, just before the dawn of day, when sentries sleep, each of our brave little band must slay his man, seize his weapons, and ride off with his horse. There must be no noise. Let each seize his man as he sleeps on his cot,

cut his throat, quickly unbuckle his pistol and sword ; the musket will be in the saddle."

"But one sentry will be awake," said Solomon, the sage.

"Never mind," said Hasan, "the sentry shall be my bird. I may take him on the wing, but most likely he will be asleep also."

Each man then took from his wallet a piece of oat-cake which, with a drink of water at the nearest spring, was their evening meal. Thus fortified, they started on their errand of blood.

It is a journey of fully eleven miles to the cantonment of Peshawur, but Afghan hill-men are quick on foot and can walk long distances.

The little party trudged along almost in silence. The only weapon they carried was a small dagger in the belt of each. They were clad in a simple blue kurta, and had divested themselves of their wallets and their shoes.

As they approached the guard, Hasan gave orders for his party to lay themselves down on the side of a ravine opposite the English cemetery.

"*Who cum dere?*" shouted the watchman at the cemetery gate, in broken English.

"That fellow must be silenced," said Hasan to Solomon, the sage.

"I know him," said Solomon, "he is a man of piety;" and going up to the watchman, Solomon, concealing his dagger, said: "I am a poor student from Cabul. I am afraid of yonder picket. Give me protection, I pray thee, until sunrise."

"Rest in peace," replied the watchman, as he threw himself on his cot to complete his morning slumbers.

Solomon returned to his party, who were still stretched on the ground.

"Hasan," said Alam, in a low whisper, "if I am shot, take care those infidels don't get my body, for they will burn it and so stop my entrance into paradise."

"Silence, you fool," said Hasan, "this is not the time for such subjects. Cheer up, my boy, the game will soon be over."

Creeping along the ground, Hasan brought his party in sight of the cavalry picket of four troopers who were sleeping on their cots, while

the fifth stood sentry with drawn sword. The armed sentry seemed to march toward the brigands, and young Alam's heart began to fail. But as the dismounted horseman turned to retrace his steps, Hasan made a "click" with his lips (the preconcerted signal), and the five Khyberee brigands sprang upon their victims. Hasan plunged his dagger into the sentry, while the other four cut the throats of the sleeping soldiers.

The dying groans, suppressed though they were by the violent effort of the murderers, warned Hasan that not a moment must be lost. He and his four companions were soon mounted on the horses of the murdered troopers, and galloping in the direction of the Khyber Pass. Save a passing shot from the cemetery watchman no alarm was given, and the five desperate members of the Guild of the Red Hand found themselves in Hasan's village with rich booty.

* * * * *

The subaltern of the week, having enjoyed himself until morning at a mess ball, did not

visit his rounds until daylight, an irregularity for which Lieutenant Boys might, under stricter discipline, have been court-martialed.

Advancing within the usual distance, the young officer waited for the challenge. But all was as silent as a tomb.

“You scoundrels! Are you all asleep?”

“Jemidār!” addressing the native officer, “are you asleep?” Then a volley of oaths not put in the most idiomatic Hindustanee, for Lieutenant Boys had not passed his examination in the native languages.

“You dogs! You owls! You sons of owls! You niggers! You——! Lieutenant Boys’s vocabulary failing him, he went closer, and to his horror beheld the whole five native troopers stretched dead on the ground.

The British guard, which was close by, was called out.

Tommy Atkins rubbed his eyes and said, “Just like them niggers. They be all dead drunk with opium.”

“It strikes me,” said another, “they’ve been fighting like Kilkenny cats, and have each cut the throats of t’other.”

Lieutenant Boys, the subaltern of the week, mounted an English guard over the corpses of the murdered troopers, and rode off to the brigade office to report the affair.

CHAPTER VII.

BERTRAM BERNARD.

“**B**EARER, ‘*peg lao*’ bring a peg!” cried Garson, the brigade major, as he galloped into the compound of the 30th cavalry mess.

“Rather early for a brandy and soda, old fellow! I thought you were a temperance man?” said Major Bertram Bernard, as he sat in the verandah of his mess enjoying his *choti haziri* of tea and toast.

“So it is,” replied Garson, as he dismounted from his charger and unloosed his sword. “But I have just seen a sight to sicken the strongest stomach. The whole cavalry picket of the 40th Lancers, on the Khyber road, have had their throats cut, their horses stolen, and nothing in the world left of them but their dead bodies. Killed like sheep, sir! by those rascals of Khyberees. Smart fellows! By

Jove ! I should think this will open the eyes of government to the state of our frontier."

"I expect it is all that Hasan's doings," said Bernard, "for, from what my men tell me, he is the pluckiest fellow that ever breathed. But what was the sentry doing that he didn't get help from the European guard, close by?"

"Heaven only knows !" said Garson ; " but there will certainly be an expedition."

"Not a bit of it, my dear sir, John Lawrence never was a fighting man, and since the mutiny they say he is as nervous as a child."

"It is certainly becoming serious," said Garson, "for two European officers have been assassinated within the last six months, and now this awful business."

"I wish government would employ me to unearth that fellow Hasan. You know he once came to see me, the rascal ! I gave him my word of honor that he should not be seized, and one of my native officers brought him in," said Major Bernard.

There was not a finer officer in the whole Indian army than Major Bertram Bernard, who commanded the 30th Bengal cavalry. He was

a man some thirty-eight years of age, of a tall manly presence. He grew a beard when beards were uncommon in the army. He had a quick penetrating eye, and his mouth, which was small and well formed, indicated much firmness of character.

His military service of twenty years had covered an eventful life. He had fought bravely in the first and second Sikh Wars, and his services in the mutiny, at the defence of Lucknow, were officially noted to have been "beyond all praise." He was a man of mark, and all his friends and his enemies, or rather his rivals, for he never made an enemy, predicted for Bertram Bernard a distinguished future.

"Take my word for it," said old Colonel Mangles of the Engineers, "that fellow Bernard will be commander-in-chief some day."

Bernard's linguistic powers were of a high order. He had taken honors in Persian and Arabic, and he was now engaged in the compilation of a dictionary of the language of the Afghans. He was in fact "an all round man."

It often happens that officers in the army who have literary tastes are not particularly

good soldiers, but it was admitted on all sides that there was not a smarter cavalry officer in the service than Major Bernard.

For years Major Bertram Bernard had been regarded as quite a ladies' man. But of late he appeared to have settled down as a confirmed woman hater.

This strange transformation in the gallant officer's character had been the subject of much interesting inquiry among the fair sex, but no satisfactory solution of the question could be obtained. If Bernard's condition of mind was perplexing to his lady friends, it was still more perplexing to himself.

"My dear fellow" (he would say sometimes to his friend Garson), "what people call love is all vanity and vexation of spirit. From what I see of married life in this country, it is just this, our English girls put forth their whole energies and employ every artifice to get a husband, and when the poor mortal is married and done for, he is simply looked upon as an individual designed by a beneficent Creator to supply the wife with a comfortable home and all the necessaries of existence. The wife spends her

days either in England or on the hills, while the poor bread-winner grills on the plains to earn his pay and get his pension. My ideal wife is a companion. A sweet confiding creature who finds no happiness but in the society of her husband, who would prefer death to separation. I know I can never meet with my ideal. Ideals are never realized."

"A sort of combination of idol and slave" (Garson would say). "A cultivated angel, in fact. A sort of Lalla Rookh, educated in the west end of London, and yet retaining all the simplicity of a village lass. A beautiful ideal, but not found in real life, my dear sir."

The truth is, that Bernard had all his life been the victim of the caprice of women. He had often thought himself in love. He had even contemplated matrimony. He had even allowed his imagination to picture a happy home and numerous olive branches.

But Bernard had never really loved. Romantic attachments, platonic friendships, and interesting flirtations, but not real love as he understood it.

And so it came to pass that this fine soldier in the very prime of life, and in the very zenith of his military career, had deliberately settled down in bachelor quarters, determined to live out his days in single blessedness.

His small bungalow was a compact little house of two rooms, with a verandah shading three sides of the building. His bed-room was scantily supplied with furniture. A cot, two chairs, and a couple of small tables were all it contained, while the bareness of the white-washed walls was relieved by a New Year's text, evidently painted by a loving hand, and which read :—

“Faint, yet pursuing.”

His sitting-room at once introduced you to the sanctum of the student and the office of the soldier. There were two roughly-made book-shelves filled with volumes of Oriental authors, and written in strange characters, various works bearing on the history of the East, and sundry editions of current literature. Scattered here and there were Bengal army lists, army regulations, military account-books, and regimental returns.

The walls of the room were covered with pictures of the most varied description—winners of the Derby, the storming of Delhi, favorite hounds, Sir Robert Peel, Arabic proverbs—while numerous guns, pistols, and daggers of Oriental design, artistically arranged, gave a military air to the room which its well-filled book-shelves seemed almost to belie.

On the mantel-piece were portraits of his numerous friends. In the centre a large cameo of a young lady clad in a religious habit, over which had been neatly engraved on its metal frame, "Who went about doing good."

Bindah, his old and faithful attendant, sat in the verandah close to his master's door ; and no wife in christendom could sew a button, or darn a stocking, or rub out a stain as Bindah could. Bindah took care of his master's purse, and, to some extent, regulated his master's charities, for every Sunday morning at gun-fire did faithful old Bindah place his master's full-dress uniform on one of the two chairs which furnished the bed-room, with the Book of Common Prayer, and a rupee for the Sunday collection.

But, although Major Bernard made up his

mind to be proof against marriage, and even affected the character of a regular woman-hater, the whole female community of the military station seemed to form a conspiracy against him. He had more invitations to croquet, luncheons, and dinners than any officer in the station.

Poor dear fellow! He must have had some dreadful disappointment, and it seemed such a pity to let him fret away in that miserable little bungalow!

But Bertram Bernard did not fret. He felt himself far happier than many a less lonely man; than Lieutenant Boys, for example, who was struggling to support a wife and four children on a subaltern's pay.

No man understood the Afghan character better than Major Bernard, and his well-known hospitality had given him a reputation throughout the whole of Central Asia. Afghans came to visit him from all parts; and on one occasion, as we have already remarked, he had entertained the renowned brigand Hasan the Khyberee, so thoroughly was the word and honor of this cavalry officer trusted even by half-civilized races.

Bernard was not a religious man in the usual acceptance of the term, and yet there were few men who thought more deeply on religion than he.

"I wish," he would often say, "I could take my religion more in the spirit of a little child. With all the problems of life before me, and the vast field of research now open to us, it is impossible for a man constituted as I am, not to have serious doubts and difficulties. I have to hammer out a creed for myself, and have not one ready made like some people."

And yet Major Bertram Bernard was a regular church-goer, for the chaplain's sermons were short, and he admired the structure and the spirit of the liturgy.

Those who knew Major Bernard best had observed a marked change in his religious feelings since his recent visit to England.

"I take life more seriously than I used to do," he often said, as he looked at the cameo portrait over the mantel-piece.

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. HESKETH'S DINNER PARTY.

“**A**MY, you must include Major Bernard in your list,” said Mr. Hesketh to his wife as she sat at her table writing invitations for her next dinner party.

“It is not the least use, for he always declines.”

“I will drop him a line as well,” said Hesketh, “if you will enclose it in yours, for I am anxious to see him!”

Mr. Hesketh, the chief civil officer at Peshawur, wrote as follows :

“DEAR BERNARD.—Mrs. Hesketh is inviting you to join our party on Monday evening. Do come if you can, for I want to have a chat about that picket business ; and as I am going out in the district I shall not be back until Monday evening.

“Yours Sincerely,

“HENRY HESKETH.”

Mrs. Hesketh's note was not the ordinary invitation, for she seldom sent formal letters to her special favorites. It ran thus: —

“I almost despair of getting you to our dinner party on Monday, my dear Major Bernard, but the general is coming and my husband wants to talk state secrets. *Do* give us the pleasure of your company at half past seven o' clock, and forsake that horrid Pushto dictionary for once to enjoy the society of your fellow creatures, and to spend a pleasant evening!

“Sincerely Yours,

“AMY HESKETH.

“P. S. Come early and you can have your chat before the general comes. I hate politics!”

“That woman again!” exclaimed Bernard, as he read the letter. “I suppose I can't get out of it this time, or I shall offend Hesketh.”

The Commissioner of Peshawur was Sir Herbert Edwardes, a man of great reputation both as a soldier and a statesman, but Sir Herbert being on furlough, Mr. Hesketh, who had a brother in the India office, was sent to

officiate. Hesketh was a most incompetent man for the post, for he understood less of frontier politics than even the Secretary of State for India. Nor could he speak a single word of the Afghan language.

It was Hesketh's absolute ignorance of Afghan affairs that made him so anxious to see Bernard, whose intimate acquaintance with the Afghans and their language made him a great authority on all Central Asian questions.

Fully alive to her husband's deficiencies, Amy Hesketh was determined to make up for them by attracting to herself the most able and useful men, and thus bring her husband in contact with those who could give him the very best information and the soundest advice.

It was Mrs. Hesketh's sole ambition to figure, some day or other, in the court circular as "Lady Hesketh," and she was determined by some means to secure for her husband a "K. C. B.", during his brief period of office at this important military outpost.

Amy Hesketh was a tall graceful woman, thirty years of age, of the highest intellectual attainments, and thoroughly accomplished.

She could play, draw, paint and etch. Nature had endowed her with a rich voice, and she was a well trained and cultivated singer. From her childhood she had been a good rider, and there was not a more spirited follower of the "Peshawur Vale hounds" than the wife of the officiating Commissioner of Peshawur.

But Amy Hesketh's special forte was flirtation. It was said she was a "born flirt." We should rather say she was an accomplished flirt. With her it was a studied science.

Amy Hesketh flirted for several reasons. First, she really liked the sensation of flirting, that indescribable "something" which makes love-making pleasant. Then, it flattered her own vanity to see men put forth the most strenuous exertions and waste the most valuable time merely just to get a loving look or a gentle touch. But Mrs. Hesketh was not one of those stupid little flirts who are forever getting into trouble. She saw in the wise and discreet use of this fascinating accomplishment the very easiest means of obtaining the one object of her life: advancement in the social scale.

"What fools men are," she would often say as she recounted her many little victories.

When at Simla last summer she had completely captivated the commander-in-chief, and it was well known that one word from Mrs. Hesketh would go further with Sir Leigh Stover than whole piles of credentials.

"By Jove! there is not a thing I wouldn't do for that woman," his excellency was often heard to say. And Sir Leigh simply spoke the honest truth. He was as fine an old soldier as ever stepped, but he was the veriest coward in the hands of a pretty woman.

Mr. Hesketh's brother civilians all declared that he got his present appointment entirely through his brother's influence at the India office, but Sir Leigh Stover knew better than that. So did Amy Hesketh.

The dinner party to which Bertram Bernard was invited was, as we have said, specially given to the major-general commanding the division.

Monday evening came, and Mr. and Mrs. Hesketh awaited the arrival of their guests. Two native orderlies paced the verandah to

give dignity to the occasion, while the *sardar*, or chief native servant, stood ready to take the shawls, rampur chaders, and cloaks, as the guests arrived.

The tall graceful form of Mrs. Hesketh contrasted strangely with the short insignificant figure of her husband. But Mr. Hesketh's pleasing and gentlemanly bearing compensated, somewhat, for the absence of nature's gifts, and showed clearly that he was not only a man of education, but also of good breeding and refinement.

Mr. Hesketh received his guests in a small ante-room, and taking each lady on his arm upon her arrival presented her to his wife, who stood graceful and queenly by the wood fire which blazed on the hearth.

First came Mr. and Mrs. Drayton, of the uncovenanted service. Both Mr. and Mrs. Drayton belonged to two of the best families in Ireland, Mr. Drayton being the grandson of an Irish earl, but being "uncovenanted" they were but on the fringe of the charmed circle of Anglo-Indian society, taking their social standing with quartermasters, paymasters,

and members of the police, salt, and telegraph departments.

Mrs. Hesketh received them most kindly. She liked blue blood. Besides, she was fond of patronizing small folks, especially when those small folks were reduced nobility.

Mrs. Hesketh took intense interest in Mrs. Drayton's baby, for she had none of her own, and she affected to share the anxieties of the young and inexperienced mother who had left her helpless babe to the care of a native ayah.

"You know these native women have a horrid way of giving opium to babies when they are restless." A piece of information which served but to increase the poor mother's anxieties, for her child was teething.

Amy Hesketh was about to soothe Mrs. Drayton's fears, when Mr. Hesketh brought in Mrs. Lawson, followed by her husband, Colonel Lawson, of the commissariat department.

Mrs. Lawson was the religious light of Peshawur. She thought so herself, and the world took her at her own valuation. Mrs. Lawson kept a mental record of the religious condition of her neighbors and divided them

all into "the saved" and "the unsaved": the "worldly" and the "Christian".

Mrs. Lawson from the first time she met Amy Hesketh at Simla had quite decided that she was an "unsaved woman".

Such a consummate flirt could never enter the Kingdom of Heaven! Others thought so too besides the wife of the commissariat officer. And yet there were perhaps few children of darkness who had been called "an angel" as often as poor Amy Hesketh. Mrs. Lawson's *sheol* was well filled, and she seemed to derive some comfort from so ghastly a contemplation.

Mrs. Lawson was Mrs. Hesketh's abomination. "That woman's virtues consist simply in the absence of temptation!" Mrs. Hesketh often said. "Or perhaps her virtues are but vice worn out," said Sir Leigh Stover when he came under Mrs. Lawson's heavy condemnation at Simla.

The civil surgeon, Dr. Dubbles, next arrived. He was a big portly man with a red face, and had, as is generally the case, a meek quiet little wife. In addition to his medical duties he

had charge of the jail. He was a better jailer than a doctor, so most people said.

Then came Major Lawry of the Royal Horse Artillery, Mrs. Hesketh's special favorite. Lawry was anything but a handsome man. His height was decidedly below the average. His face lacked expression. But he was a decided favorite among both men and women. He was a good listener. He had always on his expressionless face a good humored smile which meant anything you please, and he was master of the Peshawur Vale hounds and was always ready with a good foxy song.

"Major Lawry," whispered his fair hostess, "I am so sorry you will not sit next me this evening, but my husband says I must give you all your proper places as the general is here. I hate official etiquette, don't you?" The kind and responsive pressure of Mrs. Hesketh's tender hand was assuring, and the major smiled, as he always did.

The guests now began to arrive in quick succession.—The Reverend J. B. Brown, the station chaplain. An inoffensive sort of man

who did his duty like a Christian, but who had not yet been enrolled on Mrs. Lawson's list of saints. There was not enough brimstone in the Reverend Mr. Brown's sermons to suit Mrs. Lawson's theology.

Next came Colonel and Mrs. Noble, of Her Majesty's 110th Regiment, just arrived from England, with a very strong aversion to Anglo-Indian customs.

Then Captain and Mrs. Tompkins, lately married. Edith Tompkins was a pretty girl who had left the quiet retirement of a country rectory in England. She was quite nervous at the thought of meeting a live "major-general," for it was her first dinner party, and she had not been used to military society.

Mrs. Lawson saw in the innocent beauty a possible convert, and was kind and gracious. Amy Hesketh saw a possible rival, and was cynical and stiff.

The general was late. Sir Hugh Staley usually was at dinner, although never at parade.

"I am delighted to see you, Sir Hugh; how well you are looking!" said Mrs. Hesketh as

the old hero marched with a military air into the drawing room with his little aide-de-camp Perkins close behind him.

The gallant old man held the hand of his kind hostess until he received the usual responsive pressure. "There! isn't that a splendid rose, Mrs. Hesketh. I grafted the tree in my own garden. You can get as good roses in this part of the world as in any place I know."

"Oh, thank you, general. How *very* kind of you," she said as she smelt the rose—(the old fool thought she kissed it)—"how good of you to think of me!" And she placed it in her bosom.

"*Khanah mez par*"—"dinner is on the table," shouted a native servant standing at the dining-room door, just as the gallant general was sipping his sherry bitters.

"We cannot wait for Major Bernard," said Mrs. Hesketh somewhat angrily, "I hardly expected he would come."

She had scarcely finished the sentence, when the native orderly announced "the Major Sahib."

"I am *so* sorry I am late, Mrs. Hesketh, but one of my men was dying, and I could not find it in my heart to refuse to see the poor fellow when he sent for me."

"Is he dead?"

"Yes, he died in my arms. He was an Afghan of the Yusafzai district, from which I think we get our best recruits, a faithful man who saved my life in the mutiny."

Mr. Hesketh gave Mrs. Noble, as the senior lady, his arm and led the way; pretty Mrs. Tompkins fell to the lot of Major Bertram, while Mrs. Hesketh leaning on the general's arm brought up the rear.

"A good fellow that Major Bernard. He is perfectly adored by his men," said the general in an undertone.

"I believe he is," said Mrs. Hesketh; "but as an officer commanding a crack regiment, I think he ought to give a little more of his time to social duties."

The whole company having taken their places at the dinner-table, the Reverend Mr. Brown said a short grace (brevity always characterized the reverend gentleman's religious

duties), and the native attendants handed round the soup. Major Bernard found a pleasing companion in Mrs. Tompkins. Her unaffected manners perfectly charmed him.

"A great change this military life from your quiet country rectory," he said.

"Yes, and I am still a little homesick, but you all seem very kind and sociable."

"It is very gracious of you to say so, Mrs. Tompkins," he replied, "for I am just reminded that I have never yet called upon you."

"You must be very busy?"

"Yes, I am. For I try to take a personal interest in my men, and I am now giving some time to the study of Pushto."

"What is Pushto?"

"It is the language spoken by the Afghans."

"Is it difficult?"

"The pronunciation is exceedingly difficult. I once asked one of my men what it was like, and he put a number of pebbles in an earthen pot and rattled it. 'Pushto sounds like *that*,' he said."

"You were all through the mutiny, were you not?"

“Yes. I was at Lucknow under that splendid fellow, Henry Lawrence.”

“I think you said that poor man who died saved your life?”

“Yes. He actually threw himself over me, and received the sword cut intended for me.”

“How noble of him!”

“Many of them are very noble fellows. They are a nation of men, and I believe are yet destined to play an important part in the world’s history, even as they have done in the past. And yet many of them are perfect savages.”

“Major Bernard!” said Mrs. Hesketh, who sat opposite, and who felt she was being somewhat ignored under the fascinating influences of the country rector’s daughter. “Major Bernard! I want to ask you a question. You are so clever, and know all about these strange Afghans. Is it true they can divorce their wives at a moment’s notice?”

(Mrs. Lawson looked agonies.)

“Yes, it is quite true. If a husband even raises his three fingers or drops three stones, or even says the words three times, his wife is divorced.”

"How horrid!" exclaimed Mrs. Hesketh.

"Take care Hesketh doesn't raise his three fingers," whispered the general.

"I believe the Afghans are the lost tribes of Israel," said Mrs. Lawson in measured tones, anxious to change the subject.

"They have the tradition among themselves, but there is no trace of it in their language," replied Bernard.

The dinner lasted fully two hours, for Sir Hugh was a well-known *gourmand*, and Mrs. Hesketh had supplied an almost inexhaustive *menu*, including locust curry, which was the general's special weakness.

When the ladies had left the table, Mr. Hesketh took his wine-glass and came to the side of the table occupied by Major Bernard.

"Bernard, government is very anxious to secure your services regarding this Khyber business, but we will talk it over a little later," he whispered.

It was not until the gentlemen had joined the ladies that Mr. Hesketh took Major Bernard into his office and told him that he had suggested his name as the best man to send on

a confidential mission beyond the frontier, and that he had only a few hours ago received the necessary instructions.

"There is," said Hesketh, "an influential chieftain residing at Abukilla, near Jalalabad, named Abdullah, and known as the 'Rustum of Herat,' and government think that it is only through his influence that we can stop these raids on our frontier."

"It is a business entirely after my own heart," said Bernard.

"Yes, but we all know it is a mission of some peril."

"*Allah Hafiz*, God is protector!" exclaimed Bernard.

"Put this bundle of papers into your overcoat," said Mr. Hesketh, as he opened the office door and entered the ante-room leading to the drawing-room.

Mr. Hesketh's presence cut short an earnest effort on Mrs. Lawson's part to persuade the general to become a total abstainer.

"You know, Sir Hugh, that Sale's brigade at Jalalabad had no beer or rum, but did all their fighting on water."

"Yes, Mrs. Lawson, that is an historic fact," replied Sir Hugh, sarcastically. "They couldn't get it for the life of them, but I cannot give up my wine. You see, Mrs. Lawson, I like it, which is to me an irresistible argument. When I am shut up in Jalalabad and can't get my wine I will become a total abstainer!" and the general laughed at his little joke.

"Major Bernard," said Mrs. Hesketh, anxious to cover poor Mrs. Lawson's seeming defeat, "before you came into the room I was telling Colonel Noble that I think Buddhism the best religion, at which dear Mrs. Tompkins has been dreadfully shocked."

"Yes," replied Bernard, looking at Mrs. Tompkins, "Buddhism has many attractions for the thoughtful mind. But, speaking as an unbiased judge, I am bound to say that Gautama, the Buddha, can never do for mankind what the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth has done."

"You say you speak as an unbiased person, by which I suppose you mean as a student," said the Reverend Mr. Brown, deeply interested. "Will you kindly tell us why you have arrived at such a conclusion?"

"Because the leading thought in Buddhism is, that life is an evil, and the sooner you pass into Nirvanah, or annihilation, the better, while Jesus taught that life, both temporal and eternal, is a blessing : Christianity is a thing to live by."

"This part of the world was formerly the seat of a great Buddhist kingdom?" said Dr. Dubbles inquiringly.

"Yes, there are extensive ruins all through this valley, and yet there is not a single Buddhist to be found in the whole country now."

It was long past ten o'clock, and Mrs. Noble left, and the rest of the party soon followed.

"Do stay a little longer, Major Bernard," said Mrs. Hesketh. "You are so interesting."

There was something in Amy Hesketh's expression of face as she looked at him, which reminded him of his Lucknow days.

"Mrs. Hesketh! pardon my asking you the question, but had you a sister at Lucknow?"

"Yes, my poor sister Eva was there."

"*Poor!*—what has happened? You mean Mrs. Burton?"

"Yes, poor girl, she lost her husband only a few weeks ago."

"I knew Mrs. Burton very well."

"Yes, I have often heard her speak of you. So you are really going to Cabul?"

"It is all a state secret, I believe, but I shall most likely find my way there if the Afghans don't kill me."

"My husband has no state secrets from me," she said. "Do you know that my father was killed in Cabul?"

"Was your mother there?"

"I really cannot say. I believe she died on the march from Cabul. We never knew the whole story of our parents' deaths. How deeply interested Eva will be when she knows you are in Cabul. I will write to her by the next mail."

Bernard soon mounted his horse, and rode leisurely up the mall. He was lost in contemplation. "Eva Burton a widow! How strange! What a power of fascination she had over me! It is strange that I should hear of Burton's death just when I am most probably taking a leap into the dark valley myself!"

CHAPTER IX.

SISTER LYDIA.

AFTER a sleepless and restless night, Major Bernard rose early. Clad in a loose Cashmere choga, seated in his verandah, he summoned to his presence an Afghan officer of his regiment known as "Rasaldār Dilāwar."

This faithful man had long been Bernard's confidential adviser in all matters pertaining to Central Asian politics, and never once had he betrayed the trust.

Dilawar had, in his younger days, been a noted brigand, but under the strict vigilance of British rule he had found it wiser to exchange the uncertain career of a wild robber for the more regular occupation of a disciplined soldier.

Through the influence and teaching of a pious officer he had embraced Christianity. His religion, it is true, was of a somewhat eclectic type, embracing, as it did, a combination of the

teachings of Mohamed, Gautama, and Nānak, with those of the Bible, but such a belief, while it attached him to the conquering race, estranged him from his own countrymen, and consequently made him a still more loyal and useful servant of the state.

It was to Dilawar that Major Bernard carefully unfolded his plans for the proposed mission.

“Sahib!” said the Rasaldar, “it is impossible. You will certainly be killed if you attempt the Khyber route, and, as you are aware, all the other mountain passes are closed.”

“There is danger, very great danger, I know, but you and I, friend Dilawar, have braved danger before,” replied Bernard.

“May my life be sacrificed for you! If you go I shall go with you.”

“It was for this very purpose I sent for you, Dilawar, I want you to accompany me. You are about the only native I could trust.”

“Well, sir, if any man can go you can. Your kindness and hospitality to the Afghans are well known, and may secure you protection.”

“I have always been a well wisher to the Afghan race, for I believe there is still a high destiny in store for them.”

“But you must bear in mind that you are now going to seize one of their most desperate leaders.”

“That is true, but according to your own information Hasan and his band have already fled from their own country. We are therefore not likely to fall in with any of them in the Khyber.”

“That is quite true, sir,” replied Dilawar.

“Then I ought to tell you that I once entertained Hasan under peculiar circumstances. A price was set on his head, and yet, relying on my word, he came and stayed a night with me and gave very important information. And I do really believe if I were to meet Hasan he would give me protection in his own village, feeling bound to do so by the laws of hospitality.”

“Major Sahib!” said Dilawar with great firmness, “you cannot trust an Afghan, although I say it who am an Afghan myself.”

“Dilawar! I have trusted you, and I shall

always trust you. There are good and bad among all races of people."

"No, Sahib! don't trust even me," said the brave old soldier with a smile.

"*Indeed* I shall. Now listen! We must start at once, before it is possible for Hasan to know our intentions. I shall assume no disguise. Where British money goes there a British officer ought to find protection. We have poured lacs of rupees into Afghanistan and the Afghan people must protect me. I shall wear the native costume, because I know my Afghan friends like to see me in it. But I shall attempt no disguise. Our baggage must go on one mule and you must engage a good muleteer. A Hindu will be safest, for, as you say, we can't trust an Afghan."

The Rasaldar was amazed at his master's apparent rashness.

"Well! just as you think wisest and right, sir. You know best. If I had my way I would disarm the whole Afghan nation, and hang every Khyber brigand I could lay my hands on."

"And it is not so many years since you were a brigand yourself, my friend!"

"Yes, and if you had hanged me it would have saved government a lot of trouble. But you have made me into a Rasaldar and have decorated me with all these bits of silver," he said, pointing to his medals and laughing heartily.

"Ah, Dilawar! have you never heard the English proverb 'set a thief to catch a thief'? You were doubtless a first-class brigand and hence you are one of the smartest soldiers in the native army."

Dilawar acknowledged the compliment with a salaam. "Yes, we also say, 'take a stick from the tree and fix it to the axe'."

The conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Garson, the major of brigade, Bernard's most intimate friend. The Rasaldar saluted the officers and retired to the cook-house, outside the bungalow, to enjoy his pipe.

The two friends were soon engaged in serious conversation regarding the expedition.

"Well, Bernard, all I can say is, if you succeed in capturing Hasan the Khyberee, and thus save our cheese-paring government the expense of an expedition, you will be knighted !

—knighted, sir ! And, as old Colonel Mangles is always saying, you will be commander-in-chief some day.”

“ Yes,” continued Garson, after a short pause, in which he had waited for Bernard to speak, “ yes, it is worth the venture. Slain in the Khyber, or decorated with a K. C. B. Yes, by Jove ! it is worth the risk. Westminster Abbey or——”

“ Abukilla,” added Bernard, with a smile.

“ Garson ! ” said Bernard, looking seriously, “ you will not accuse me of cowardice, I know, when I tell you that I have a very strong presentiment, indeed, an overpowering conviction, that I shall end my days in Afghanistan, as so many others have done before me.”

“ Well, my dear fellow, don’t be down-hearted about it. *I* have a strong presentiment that you will return and be a great man some day.”

“ Now, Garson, let us descend from the regions of dream-land to the ordinary (or rather, to the extraordinary) affairs of life. There are one or two things I want you to do for me.”

“ I am your honor’s slave,” said Garson, affecting a lightness of heart which he did not

feel, for he too thought it likely he would never see his friend Bernard again.

“I want you to take charge of this dispatch-box. It contains my private papers. Should anything happen to me, send it to Sister Lydia, of the Dalston Sisterhood in London.”

“And who is ‘Sister Lydia’?”

“Garson! I had almost said it is no business of yours, but you have always been a true friend to me, and you shall know.

“When I was in London last year,” Bernard continued, “I was seized with scarlet fever in my lonely lodgings in Gower Street. My pious old aunt, who is a district visitor in Canon Sleek’s parish, and who is almost the only relative I have in the world, never came near me, but left me to the tender mercies of the lodging-house keeper. The doctor, who was a religious man, wrote to a sisterhood in Dalston, which was, at that time, being attacked in some of the religious newspapers, and they sent me a nurse in the person of a young lady clad in a religious habit. She never divulged her name, and was known to me and the doctor only as ‘Sister Lydia.’ She attended to my

wants with the greatest devotion. She often read to me, and frequently spoke to me, on religious subjects. I became warmly attached to her, and although not a word on the subject was ever exchanged between us, I could see that she was deeply interested in me."

Garson elevated his eyebrows.

"You need not smile, Garson. Man of the world though I am, or rather was, I should have thought it sacrilege to have attempted to gain the affections of a girl who had taken, as I found she had, the vows of her order. She seemed to feel the awkwardness of her position, and when she left me she made the strange compact that while she would allow me to correspond with her, I would never attempt to see her again. 'It is better not,' she said, with a tearful eye; and I made the promise on the one condition that I should possess her portrait. That cameo over my mantel-piece, which I always show as 'my sister's' portrait, is her likeness. I tried to get some further information regarding her from my old landlady, but all she knew was that Sister Lydia's father had been killed somewhere in

India—a circumstance which, I need scarcely tell you, did but increase my interest in her. I have a faint recollection that she did once tell me her father's name. It was one night when she thought I was dying, but it has certainly passed from my memory. We correspond regularly, but her letters are always on the subject of religion."

"A *very* interesting flirtation!" exclaimed Garson.

"Garson, my good fellow! you really make me angry. I tell you there has been no flirtation."

"I beg your pardon. But you must admit that it is a very romantic and interesting episode in a fellow's life," replied Garson.

"I don't mind confessing to you, Garson, that that woman, child in fact, for she could not be much more than twenty years of age, not only saved my life but restored my faith. If I were on my death bed now, I should throw all systems of theology and of philosophy to the winds and say simply, my faith is that of Sister Lydia's."

"Even as a little child," said Garson, quoting the chaplain's text of last Sunday's sermon.

“Yes, that is just it, Garson. The truth is, the Punjab has been rather overdone with religion of late. But, as I understand it, Sister Lydia’s faith, as exemplified in her simple life, is more like the teaching of the Son of God than anything I have yet seen.”

“Well, I believe more in the religion of Sister Lydia than I do in that of Mrs. Lawson, who won’t even give our good little chaplain a place in the Kingdom of Heaven.”

“I judge no man ; or woman either. Not even Mrs. Lawson,” said Bernard.

“You are the most charitable being I have ever met with. But you must admit there are some very unpleasant Christians in the world.”

“Yes, I admit it. And I must confess that until I was brought in contact with that simple minded little Christian from Dalston, I had always avoided the so called Christian society.”

“And no wonder,” exclaimed Garson as he lit a cigar. “To tell you the honest truth, I hope these good Christian people will change their dispositions, be a little more amiable, talk

less scandal, etc., before they get into the Kingdom of Heaven, or really I shall feel quite uncomfortable in their society. Heaven, no matter how angelic the music, would be a very unpleasant place with a bevy of Mrs. Lawsons inside its gates."

"Do you know, Garson, I think you also will have to change a *little* before you reach the delectable land," said Bernard rather seriously. "But I quite agree with you. And yet, some of these people have very many good points. They are better than their creed. They could not sleep in their beds if they really believed all their theology. I quite expect a great reaction from the present state of things even in my own day."

"You seem to think I might be better. Well, Bernard, I must go to London, live in Gower Street, get scarlet fever, send for a Dalston sister, yield to the gentle pressure of a loving hand on my feverish brow, respond to the sweet smile of bewitching eyes, and so forth; and grow good," said Garson laughing.

"I believe a good wife would be the making of you," said Bernard.

"No, I am too young to marry. No man should marry until he is thirty-five."

"That is contrary to the generally received opinion, is it not?"

"I believe it is, and yet all the experience of life seems to prove that I am right. A young fellow, a mere boy, does not know his own mind as to the sort of wife he really needs."

"But I always thought that *falling in love* had something to do with it."

"Well, I suppose it has, but just see how soon men 'fall out' of love. The genuine article is a very rare thing, I can assure you."

"Why, Garson, you talk like a sage."

"Bernard! tell me candidly and honestly were you ever really in love?"

Bernard remained for some time in a state of apparent abstraction. He was really thinking of his Lucknow days, and of Gower Street. "That is rather an awkward question."

"I thought so," said Garson smiling.

"Well, I do really believe I am telling you the downright honest truth when I say, I have never known what *true love* is. But at the same time I must tell you, it has been my mis-

fortune on two occasions to become very much fascinated with those with whom I could not honorably fall in love."

"Ah! I thought a man of your age couldn't have escaped altogether."

"But excuse me, my friend, were *you* ever in love?" inquired Bernard.

"It is my chronic state and condition," said Garson.

"I thought as much," said Bernard. "But let us proceed to business. Please take the greatest care of this little box, for it contains valuable government securities, and if you hear of my death send it to Sister Lydia."

"All right, Bernard, if those Afghans do cut you up, 'Sister Lydia' shall have the precious box, even if I go by the overland route and deliver it myself."

Captain Garson then left for his own quarters with a native servant carrying the dispatch box behind him. And Major Bernard sat down at his office table, and wrote the following letter:
"DEAR SISTER LYDIA—

"I am starting on an important political mission beyond the British frontier. In

the present unsettled state of the country it is certainly a very hazardous undertaking. The chances (if you will allow me to speak of chances), are very much against my ever returning. I have, therefore, thought it necessary to arrange all my worldly affairs.

“I am leaving in the charge of Captain Garson, the major of brigade at Peshawur, a dispatch-box, which contains my last will and testament. You are my executrix and my sole legatee. I have considerable property, but it is all at your disposal. Your vows of poverty will, perhaps, prevent your taking it yourself, but you can apply it at your discretion to charitable uses. You need not scruple to receive it, for my only surviving relative is a rich maiden aunt, who has more money than she knows what to do with.

“And now, my dear friend, I cannot conclude this letter, written as it is under peculiar circumstances, without saying once more, what I have often written, that you have, by your simple methods, exercised a marvellous influence over both my mental and religious life. Your kind ministrations to me last year, and

your many sweet Christian letters since, have made me both a wiser and a better man. Mine has, in many respects, been a disjointed and broken life, some would say an inconsistent life, but you have done much to bring the links together.

“When we parted you said we must never meet again. Not in this world of sin and sorrow, perhaps, but I shall humbly hope to meet you in Heaven :

‘ Where thou, sweet saint, before the choir shalt go,
As harbinger of heaven, the way to show,
The way which thou so well hast learned below.’

“ Ever sincerely yours,

“ BERTRAM BERNARD.”

CHAPTER X.

RUNNING THE GAUNTLET.

“WHO comes there?”

“Friend!”

“Pass, friend! All is well!” replied the sentry.

And Major Bernard and his faithful Afghan friend Dilawar passed the military guard on the very spot where, only a few weeks before, the whole cavalry picket had been massacred to a man by Hasan and his desperate band.

“Don’t loiter behind,” said Dilawar to the muleteer who came with the baggage. “We must all keep together.”

It was a little past midnight when they started on their way, and they had scarcely reached the entrance of the dismal and uninviting Khyber by sunrise.

“*Har kala rāsha!* May you ever come!”

exclaimed a horseman, as he galloped up to the side of the English officer.

"Who are you?" said Dilawar, placing his hand upon his revolver. "Come you as friend or foe?"

"I come as a friend. I am Alak, the son of Abdullah, the Rustum of Herat. I am sent by my father to escort the English officer in safety to our fort."

"You are indeed welcome," replied Bernard.

The arrival of the chieftain's son was a great relief to Major Bernard's mind, for, knowing that Alak was a secret member of the Guild of the Red Hand, he felt he could not possibly have a better or a safer escort.

"Major Sahib!" said Alak, "let me tell you before we enter the Pass, that neither I nor any human being can control the actions of a wild unmanageable spirit like Hasan the Khyberee."

"Hasan and I are not strangers to each other. He was my guest on one occasion when his life was entirely at my mercy," replied Bernard.

"That may be quite true," said Alak, "But

you must bear in mind that you are on a special expedition for his capture."

"Well, not exactly for his capture. My special mission is the suppression of the raids on our frontier. But if I become his guest I shall expect the same protection in his country, as I once gave to him when he sojourned with me."

"I will explain matters to him if we meet (which God grant we may not). Although I scarcely expect to see him, for I am told he has fled into the distant hills," said Alak.

A tedious journey of some nineteen miles brought the party to Ali Masjid, the well-known fort in the centre of the defile. The fort is situated on the heights above the road and was at this time occupied by a strong garrison of the Ameer's troops.

The Afghan commandant of the fort was an old and well-trusted servant of the Ameer, but as Major Bernard came with no credentials from his highness he did not receive the foreigner with the very best grace.

"I admit," said Major Bernard, "that it would have been more in order if I possessed

a pass from the Ameer, but surely these letters from my own government ought to be sufficient. Afghans travel through the length and breadth of India with perfect safety. Why then is your country closed to the English traveller ? ”

“ That is true, sir,” said the commandant; “ but it was your invading army which closed Afghanistan against you. Before you forced yourselves as conquerors you were welcome everywhere. The Afghans have ever been a hospitable race.”

The commandant supplied them with such fare as the garrison possessed and gave them comfortable quarters for the night. At sunrise they left with the salutations of peace and resumed their journey. The road from Ali Masjid to Lundi Kotal is through the stony bed of a mountain stream and opens on to a small arid plain in which are the ruins of an old Buddhist tope. It then rises along the side of the lower ranges until it descends to the valley of Dakka from whence the traveller obtains sight of the Cabul River and the eternal snows of the Hindu-Kush in the far off distance.

The hospitality of the fort and the assuring presence of Alak, together with the uneventful character of the journey, had made the travellers almost forget they were in an enemy's country, and as they were in sight of the Ameer's territory, Major Bernard had begun to think the perils of the journey were well nigh over.

The faithful Dilawar had even begun to pay less attention to the loaded chambers of his Colt's revolver, while the Hindu muleteer in restful security, was singing the familiar ditty of *nani pani*.

Bernard had just lighted a cheroot, when a rapid fire of muskets from the rocks above opened briskly upon them.

"*Lubaika !*" cried Alak, giving the pass-word of the guild, and the firing ceased.

In a few moments they were confronted with none other than the desperate brigand Hasan the Khyberee and two of his chosen band.

Bernard and Dilawar presented their revolvers and the brigands at once saw the horsemen had the advantage.

“Not one step nearer, friends,” exclaimed Dilawar, “or you are all dead men.”

“One question I will put to you, O brother Alak, and it is this: in the name of the Prophet, what brings you in company with infidels: with those who eat pork, drink wine, and curse our Prophet’s holy name?” said Hasan.

“They are my father’s guests.”

“True, but they are the enemies of our religion and of our race!”

“Stay!” exclaimed Bernard in excellent Pushto; “if I remember rightly even Hasan the Khyberee once ate the salt of the infidel he now despises!”

Hasan, heedless of the six chambers of Dilawar’s revolver, sprang forward and seized Major Bernard’s hand—“And is it you, Major Sahib! Hasan has never slain one whose salt he has eaten. You shall pass in peace.”

“You needn’t talk about slaying,” said Dilawar, “for it would appear we are more than a match for you.”

“Silence, Dilawar!” said Bernard; “this is not the time nor the place for a strife of words.

We are Hasan's guests, and we are truly indebted to him for protection."

Hasan assisted Major Bernard to dismount, and his two followers led the horses behind them as they strolled leisurely to a little village close by.

Cots were soon drawn out in front of the village guest-house, and pillows and quilts were spread for the hospitable entertainment of the strangers by Hasan and his companions.

"You can rest here in peace," said Hasan, "and continue your journey in the cool of the evening. Mounted as you are, you can easily reach the fort of the Rustum of Herat by night prayer."

"Your kindness and hospitality are indeed great," said Bernard, "but we must take care of our baggage."

"The baggage need not cause you any anxiety. We can take care of that," said the brigand with a suppressed smile.

"Solomon the sage" soon arrived with two cups of sherbet, which he handed to the travellers, when, just as they raised the vessels to their lips, a gang of ruffians rushed upon

Bernard and Dilawar and seized their weapons. They soon found themselves bound hand and foot upon two cots, while in the distance they saw the poor helpless Hindu muleteer fall beneath Hasan's dagger. Alak had disappeared, but whether he had fallen a victim to the treachery of his own guild it was impossible to tell.

"This is rather a bold scheme of yours, major," said Hasan, as he stood beside the prostrate officer, his hands still stained with the blood of the poor helpless Hindu. "Rather a bold scheme to take the lion in his own lair."

Bernard remained silent, for he knew that any words of protestation he might utter would but increase the anger of the enraged brigand. But he now saw the folly of trusting the word of a wild and desperate character such as Hasan.

So fearful were the brigands of the soldierly prowess of the English major and his brave companion, that they kept them securely bound upon the charpoys, not even loosing the thongs to give them their scanty evening meal.

In this helpless condition Bernard lay till long past midnight, when suddenly he felt the

thongs which bound him loosed by a friendly hand.

"Dilawar, is that you?" whispered Bernard, as he felt himself gradually restored to liberty.

"Silence," said Alak (for it was he). "It can never be that a guest of the Rustum of Herat perish in the infernal regions of the Khyber."

"But are you not a sworn member of their band?"

"This is not the time for questions. Follow me."

"I cannot go without Dilawar."

"That you must, for he was slain about an hour ago."

"By whom?"

"By Hasan's own hand."

"Then I shall not leave this place until I have avenged his death."

"That is impossible. Remember, you are unarmed."

"Where is Hasan?"

"He has retired to his house, and has left me in charge of his prisoner. No time must be lost. Keep your lips closed. Follow me.

Mount your horse and ride for your very life to our fort at Abukilla. The road is good."

"Give me my sword and revolver."

"There they are," said Alak.

Alak led Major Bernard silently to a small coppice close to the village graveyard, where his white charger was tethered. They were soon mounted.

"Why do you linger?" said Alak.

"I must once more gaze on the face of my faithful Afghan friend Dilawar."

"That is impossible," replied Alak, "for his corpse is still stretched on a cot in Hasan's court-yard."

"Then call Hasan! for escape is impossible until Dilawar's death is avenged."

"Major Sahib, you're mad!"

"Yes, I am." And Major Bernard shouted, "Hasan! Hasan! you traitor, come forth!"

In a few moments the little village was all excitement as Hasan appeared riding a poor half-starved beast such as usually exists in the barren defile of the Khyber.

"Remember, Alak!" said Bernard, with authority, "remember, your safety rests simply

in obeying my commands." And the cavalry officer appeared as confident of success as though he had been at the head of his own regiment, instead of commanding a company of "one," and that *one* a very doubtful ally.

The villagers opened out an aimless fire from their muskets as Hasan advanced to attack Bernard, who feigned a retreat so as to separate the brigand from his unmounted followers.

Hasan continued in hot pursuit, when suddenly Bernard pulled up and exclaimed: "You traitor! you coward! you son of Satan!" and taking deliberate aim, shot the brigand dead.

"*Shahbash!* Well done!" exclaimed Alak, as they galloped away at full speed. "Major! you are a true Afghan, and know how to avenge the death of a friend."

"Alak!" said Bernard, with evident emotion, "government could have spared me far better than they could part with a faithful Afghan soldier like Dilawar. But, friend Alak, are you not a member of Hasan's guild?"

"Thou hast truly spoken," said Alak, "but you must know that it was concerning the

death of Dilawar that Hasan and I had a dispute last night. My plan was to spare your lives and dictate terms to the English government, but that hypocrite, "Solomon the sage," demanded the life of the poor old infidel, Dilawar. True, I am a member of the Guild of the Red Hand (and he held up his open palm whereon was the ominous red spot), but I am also the son of the 'Rustum of Herat,' and all the world knows that Abdullah, even in his darkest deeds, ever acted as a man of honor."

"Alak! you Afghans are truly a strange people. The more I see of you the less do I understand you."

"We are *Bene Israel*. We are indeed a strange people," said Alak, as he urged on his horse. "But if you want to see a real Afghan, wait until you behold the blessed face of my noble father."

Major Bernard and Alak rode at full speed until they reached the little town of Dakka, where they found saddled horses, and a small escort of mounted retainers sent by the chief of Abukilla. Fatigued by the long and exciting journey, and almost broken-hearted at the

loss of his faithful friend, Major Bernard arrived at the pretty little village of Abukilla at sunset and was warmly welcomed as he entered its quaint old fort.

"*Starai ma shai!*" "May you never be tired," exclaimed the fine old chieftain as he received his English guest.

"*Har shah neki!*" "May you ever be prosperous," responded Bernard, as he dismounted from his jaded steed.

The whole fort was in a state of bustle and excitement with strenuous efforts to give a hospitable and real Afghan welcome to the foreigner. Akbar, the slave, the chief's own personal attendant, brought a large *chilam*, or pipe, another slave handed a glass of sandal sherbet, while the village jester stooped to shampoo the wearied limbs of the newly arrived guest.

Addullah listened attentively as his son graphically described the exciting incidents of the journey; and continuous and loud were the "*sabashes*" and "*afreens*," as he told the story of Bernard's determination to avenge the death of his Afghan friend. It was evidently a deed

which commended itself to the natural instincts of the Afghan mind.

"You are right welcome, brave sir, to my poor dwelling. I saw much of the English during the last war. But we should have liked you better then had you come as friends instead of conquerors. We are of the same race, for our learned men say you also are the sons of Israel."

* * * * *

"You must pardon my seeing but little of you the next day or two," the old man said, as he rose to leave his guest, "but I am busily engaged in preparations for my second daughter's nuptials which are about to be celebrated."

"Who is the fortunate man?" inquired Bernard.

"The Khan of Lalpura, the leading Mohmund chief."

CHAPTER XI.

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT.

THE room occupied by the English guest was one of those apartments in an Eastern dwelling known as a *balakhana*, or, upper room. The windows, of sliding shutters, opened the whole length of the chamber and commanded an extensive view of the valley below and of the snow-clad mountains in the distance. A winding staircase communicated with the outer court in which was the chieftain's guest-house, and a small door opened on to the roof of the harem and led to the female apartments of the household, the chamber being usually tenanted by Abdullah himself, and only on very special occasions devoted to the accommodation of strangers.

It had an air of comfort and even luxury. A Persian carpet covered the floor; soft cushions and pillows of every conceivable size,

shape, and color were arranged as lounges on every side; and upon a handsomely gilded couch were thrown quilts of the richest Bukhara silks. The walls of the chamber were covered with gaudy French pictures representing nearly all the crowned heads of Europe, past and present, while the prominence given to a cheap painting of Napoleon, standing on the barren rocks of St. Helena, seemed to indicate that the military renown of the exiled Corsican had even excited the admiration of the old Afghan warrior who now held the fort of Abukilla. Curious recesses painted in fantastic colors were filled with glasses, cups, and tea-pots, of every design and shape; and on the cornices above had been skilfully arranged alternate rows of oranges, apples, and yellow daffodils. It was evident that some report of Major Bernard's linguistic and literary fame had preceded him, for upon a small table in the corner were piles of books in Persian, Pushto and Arabic, including a copy of Carey's translation of the Pentateuch.

After a night of heavy slumber Bernard was awakened soon after sunrise by the appearance

of Alak holding up a pair of copious pijamahs, as Akbar the slave stood behind with an ewer of water, a towel, and a comb for the Englishman's morning toilet.

"My father has sent you these," said Alak, opening out a bundle of clothes, "for it will be some time before we can recover your baggage from those demons of Khyberees."

"How elegantly this choga is embroidered," said Bernard as he examined a white robe of the most costly needle-work.

"*The house*"—by which Alak meant some one of the ladies of the harem—"is very clever at this kind of work. I am surprised the old man sent it, for it is his favorite robe. The one he wears on feast days and weddings."

"You had better change it for another," Alak continued, addressing Akbar.

"The master specially selected it," replied the slave.

"The generosity of your benevolent father flows even as the waters of *Al-Kausar*," said Bernard as the slave poured water on his hands and held the comb and towel.

As Alak held a small hand-mirror, and Ber-

nard combed out his long flowing beard, he exclaimed:

“By the Prophet! you are a capital shot, sir!”

“Well, I have the reputation of being a very fair one when my hand is steady.”

“You brought that Khyberee to the ground like a mountain deer.”

“I was sorry to shoot the fellow, but I was determined to avenge the death of one of my most faithful friends.”

“Major Sahib! I am not surprised that the men of your regiment are devoted to you. You can love and you can hate with all the passion of an Afghan.”

“Alak!” said Bernard, very solemnly and looking the young man in the face, “friend Alak! the color of a man’s skin, or the language he speaks, or even the religion he professes never influences me in my friendships. God has made us all of one blood.”

“Why that is very much what my old father says. The Rustum of Herat is a very remarkable man, sir.”

“I am sure he must be, and I am most anxious to secure his friendship.”

“Major Sahib!” said Alak in a whisper, “you know enough of our customs to be well aware that now you have slain Hasan the Khyberee, every member of his guild is in honor bound to avenge his death.”

“I feel safe in the hands of the Rustum of Herat,” replied Bernard looking keenly at Alak as he left the room.

Major Bernard fully realized the true import of the young Afghan’s words, knowing, as he did, that Alak was a member of the notorious band. But it seemed unlikely that the young man would attempt anything as long as Bernard was under his father’s roof.

Reclining on his couch, and thinking of little else than the perilous position he was placed in, Bernard’s eyes rested on a crevice in the little wooden door which communicated with the female apartments of the harem. Partly from curiosity, as well as to ascertain if he were being watched, Bernard sprang from his cot and peeped through the aperture, when to his amazement he found he had a full view of the central court of the harem!

Knowing well the jealousy with which East-

ern races regard all communications with their seraglios, Major Bernard's first impulse was to call the chieftain's son, and to direct his attention to the broken door, but a moment's reflection convinced him that such a step would excite the suspicions of so undisciplined a character as Alak.

Bernard lost no time in cutting a splinter from one of the shutters. But, as he was endeavoring to fix it to the door, his attention was arrested by a fairy-like scene in the court-yard below. There, standing on the marble parapet of the well in the centre of the court-yard was the nymph-like form of a most beautiful young girl draped in a loose white kurta. Her rich deep auburn tresses fell gracefully on her exquisitely formed shoulders, and her eyes sparkled, as with the freshness of the morning dew, as she playfully raised her pretty little hand in stern rebuke to the mischievous little olive-skinned slave girl who tenderly wiped her feet. The perfect symmetry of her delicately moulded figure was clearly shown as she sprang forward to catch the roguish little bondmaid, who ran and hid herself behind the *charpoy* on

which were scattered the various articles of the fair maiden's wardrobe.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Bernard to himself, "what a captivating creature!"

He would fain have lingered on the forbidden scene, but the sound of footsteps on the outer staircase warned him to desist. Quickly covering the treacherous crevice in the forbidden door, he returned to his couch with an enslaved heart. He had beheld, and he had loved—(even at first sight)—the fair girl who was known only to the outside world as the "Maid of Herat": Ruhainah, the daughter of Abdullah.

In a few moments Abdullah entered the chamber, resting on his staff and somewhat out of breath from the steep ascent of the winding staircase.

"May you ever come! My house is yours! We are all your honor's slaves!" were the Afghan salutations with which the benevolent old chieftain welcomed his English guest.

"You must be tired after your exciting ride of yesterday, but you seem to have done your work in true Afghan fashion," he said.

"I am certainly an Afghan in this, that I

know how to speedily avenge the foul assassination of my friends," said Bernard.

"True, true, Major Sahib! but it all increases my responsibility. Hasan's friends will surely seek your life."

"I feel perfectly safe in your hospitable fort."

"True, true," said the old man thoughtfully, "but I do not always feel safe even in my own dwelling. These are the last days, sir, when there is decay of faith among men, and you cannot now even trust the word of a Moslem. Why, sir," he added in a suppressed tone of voice, "these are days when you cannot trust even your own children.

"You like that choga?" the old man continued, glad, as it appeared, to change the subject, "you like the beautiful needle-work in that robe?"

"It is indeed exquisite," replied Bernard, as he examined his coat more carefully. "Did you buy it in Persia?"

"No," replied the old chieftain with a smile. "It was done by my—by the *house*." An expression which although framed in the inani-

mate neuter was understood by Bernard to refer to some female member of the harem.

After a long conversation with Major Bernard regarding the special object of his mission, Abdullah left his English guest in the upper chamber alone.

“I am getting an old man, sir, but my son Alak will attend to your commands. My house is yours. May God protect you!” said the hospitable host as he left his guest to descend the stairs.

Looking around him Bernard observed that the splinter of wood which he had placed in the door had fallen from its place and that a pair of bright eyes—evidently those of a girl—were peeping through the aperture. Could they be the eyes of the fair maiden who had so captivated him? Impossible! No Afghan girl of the reputed modesty of the Maid of Herat would be guilty of such conduct.

It was Gulandāmah the slave girl.

“Open the door! open the door!” said the voice in a whisper.

“Impossible,” said Bernard, feeling that although he had escaped the designs of Hasan

the Khyberee he might not be so successful in resisting the intrigues of a pretty slave girl.

"If you care for your life, you will let me in," whispered Gulandamah.

"Where is the chief?"

"He is in the mosque."

"Where is Alak?"

"He has gone to the fields."

"Are you quite alone?"

"Yes."

Bernard gently opened the door and admitted Gulandamah.

"Tell me as quickly as you can all you wish to say and be as brief as possible," he said. "If you are found in my room I shall be killed."

"You will be killed any way," said the girl.

"What do you mean?"

"Alak, last night, told his sister Ruhainah that, as you had slain Hasan the chief of his guild, he must take your life; and, as it is her turn to cook the food for the guests this morning, he gave her a packet of poison to put in your food. So my mistress has sent me to warn you of your danger."

Bernard, who from his long contact with

Oriental life had become almost a fatalist, thought to himself, "How strange that I should owe my life to that beautiful creature who so captivated my heart only a short time ago—it must be my *kismet*."

"Stay, my little maid! I will give you something for your fair mistress," and taking a slip of paper he wrote the Pushto couplet:—

"Prudence sets great store by name and fame,
Love casteth both away."

"Now please give this letter to the Fair Maid of Herat and tell her how truly grateful her English guest is for her kind protection," said Bernard, as he placed in the little slave-girl's hand the piece of paper and a few silver rupees. Gulandamah gently closed the door, and Bernard stealthily watched her through the crevice as she descended into the court-yard and approached her mistress. The beautiful Ruhainah blushed as she read Bernard's lines, and, as Gulandamah looked in the direction of the door, she sweetly smiled.

"That smile, how familiar it seems to me, and how sweet!"

As some time elapsed before the serving of his morning meal Bernard reclined on his couch and abandoned himself to dreamy and romantic contemplation.

“Only two days have passed since I emerged from the civilized life of a military cantonment,—and here I am in the regions of semi-savagery, and entirely at the mercy of these brutes of Afghans!—Poor old Dilawar is no more!—The very brigand, whose lawless acts it is my special mission to suppress, has been slain by my own hand!—And here I am on the very eve of being poisoned! yes, poisoned! and that just after I seem to have had a glimpse of the Prophet's own paradise!”—and Bernard laughed at his own joke.

Yes, he could not, for the very life of him, get that young girl's face out of his mind. It was not the first pretty face he had seen by many a thousand, but never in the whole course of his life had he beheld a face like that. He was in love! There was not the slightest doubt about it. *In love with an Afghan girl!* The whole thing was just like a page of the Arabian Nights, or of some other strange Eastern

romance. What would the end of the chapter be? Would he die like a poisoned cur, or would he slay Alak and run off with the beautiful sister? What will be the end of it all?

Such were the thoughts passing through Bernard's mind when Alak entered the room with an attendant carrying several dishes of food, on a handsome tray.

Spreading a large colored cloth on the floor, Alak, placing the dishes upon it, invited the major to partake heartily of his morning meal.

"You must be hungry, sir, after your exertions of yesterday. The *house* has very carefully prepared these dishes and I hope they will suit your honor's palate."

"Will you not join me? It is surely contrary to your custom for a guest to eat alone?"

"It is one of my fast days," said Alak, and he left the room.

"It is very evident that either you or I must die, friend Alak," thought Bernard, as he cast a glance at his revolver.

"Eat on, you are safe!" exclaimed a female voice from the inner door.

“Were these delightful dishes of *plau*, and curry and *peereenee*, and heaven knows what, all prepared by the sweet little fingers of your fair mistress?”

“And by my sweet little fingers too,” said Gulandamah slyly.

“Gulandamah! my good little maid, you must go.—But stay!—Tell me, was your young mistress *very* angry when she read my Pushto verse?”

“Not *very*.”

CHAPTER XII.

SHAILY'S WEDDING.

AMID the deafening beatings of drums, the discordant pipings of pipes, and the intermittent firings of muskets in every street, lane, and alley of the village, the gloomy heart of the once bright little Shaily thrilled and throbbed with the conflicting elements of wonder and despair, as she gazed pensively on the playful waters of the marble fountain as they rippled and glistened in the sunny morn.

Clad in rich and luxurious pijamahs of bright crimson satin, covered to the knees with a graceful kurta of green and gold, her whole figure veiled with white spangled muslin wrought in skilful needle-work by her sister's loving hand, Shaily reclined her dark dimpled cheek on Ruhainah's fair arm, as her large lustrous eyes (the truest type of Eastern beauty), seemed to speak more eloquently than mortal tongue that

all the sounds of merriment and joy on this her nuptial day were but as the wails of lamentation for a shrouded spirit. The joyous strains of the village minstrels penetrated even the thick walls of the secluded harem, but the flow of revelry and the round of merriment did but deepen the heavy gloom which overshadowed the soul of that sweet little Shaidy who for sixteen short years had been the joy, the pet, and the toy of the household of the Rustum of Herat.

“Shaidy, my life !” said her mother, “you must cheer up and not manifest such grief on this your wedding day.”

“Mother dear ! I am reconciled to my fate. But it is indeed hard to leave you all. To leave you, my loving mother. To leave Ruhainah, my own sweet sister, to leave——!” But she dare not utter the beloved name, for none knew of her passion for Yusuf save her sister and the faithful little slave.

“Look here !” exclaimed the Sadozie wife of royal lineage. “Look here ! these heavy bangles of the purest gold have been sent as a wedding present by none other than the Ameer of

Cabul!" and the noble lady stooped and bound them on the wrists and ankles of the young bride.

"These beautiful earrings," said Alak's mother, "are my present, my child! The Almighty never gave me a daughter, but I have ever loved you and Ruhainah with a mother's love," and she tenderly placed them in Shaidy's ears.

"My offering," said the young Sheenwaree wife, "is this nose ring. Nand Ram, the Hindu, procured it from Ajmeer; it is of rare workmanship, I am told."

"The old heathen stole it, I verily believe!" whispered Gulandamah to Ruhainah.

"Shaidy, my own darling sister! my life! my rose! accept of my poor little offering, it is only a silver ring, for the learned say the Prophet never wore gold, but on its ruby signet is inscribed AR RAKEEB, 'the Watcher.' And may God *watch* between thee and me." And Ruhainah kissed her sister's hand as she placed on her finger the mystic ring.

Gulandamah stood by in amazement as she beheld the sparkling jewels (for there were

many other rich gifts, including a brilliant tiara from the bridegroom's mother), as they glistened on the rich luxuriant dress of the veiled figure of her lovely young mistress; and clapping her hands and dancing in the wildest excitement she exclaimed: "O you houri of paradise! you royal princess! you are just like the beautiful bride of Shahriyaar! You are even as a bright star shot straight from the spangled heavens! O my sweet Sultana! you will be as happy as the favorite wife of some mighty Caliph. By the Prophet! won't those other wives and slave girls be jealous of Shaidy the beautiful daughter of the Rustum of Herat?"

"Gulandamah, do not be silly and talk nonsense!" said Ruhainah with some authority.

"O my good mistress! I am but a slave!" and Gulandamah knelt humbly and cast her turban at Ruhainah's feet. "Why even Shahbaz is paid for playing the fool."

"True, but he is the village jester, and you are a serving maid."

Gulandamah placed her hand on her lips and silently wondered if Ruhainah was

jealous of her sister's surpassing beauty. For her part, she had never been able to understand why the fair Ruhainah with her auburn tresses and her dreamy eyes was considered so much more beautiful than her younger sister with her glossy black ringlets and her full dark lustrous eyes.

"Gulandamah !" said Shaidy coaxingly, "Ruhainah is not angry with you ; she loves you just as much as I do, but, you know, her heart is sad to-day. Now that we three are alone, I want you to sew this little slip of paper you brought this morning, into a piece of silk, for I shall wear it as an amulet."

"May I read it ?" enquired Ruhainah.

"Yes. They are Yusuf's own lines."

And she read :—

In vain I seek excitement's glare,
Commune with friends or idly rove ;
My breast still heaves with deep despair,
O'erwrought by hopeless fatal love.

"Poor Yusuf !" added Ruhainah as she folded the slip of paper and gave it to the slave girl, who quickly sewed it in a piece of blue silk,

and suspended it on her mistress's neck. "Poor Yusuf!"

"Thank you, Gulandamah," said Shaidy. "And now you must tell Yusuf that it is here." And she clasped the precious talisman to her heart.

While the interior of the chieftain's harem was presenting a somewhat gloomy spectacle, the outer court was the scene of the wildest revelry and excitement. Everything had been done that possibly could be done to impress the English guest with the importance of Abdullah's position as a leading Afghan chieftain. The entrance to the fort was lined with mounted retainers, some of whom were clad in ancient chain-armor. The interior of the court was crowded with minstrels and dancing girls. Busy attendants rushed to and fro serving costly sherbets, and handing round the calumet of peace. Numerous guests from all parts of the Afghan world came with hearty congratulations, as the venerable chieftain welcomed them with the salutations of peace.

Long rows of cots were arranged in a semicircle, in the centre of which the Rustum of

Herat reclined resting on a huge white pillow, over which had been thrown a beautiful Cashmere quilt. Major Bernard sat on his right and Mullah Ahmad the priest on his left, thus forming a strikingly picturesque group in the centre of a throng of turbaned guests representing the various tribes and families of Central Asia. So great was the reputation of the chief of Abukilla, that friends had hastened to congratulate him on his alliance with the leading Mohmund chief, even from the remotest regions of Bushire, Bukhārah, and Nepāl. The old man's face radiated with delight as he now realized the wide extent of his fame and popularity. It was evident that the depressing and gloomy atmosphere of the harem had not reached the hospitable environments of the chieftain's guest-house. Mullah Ahmad, the priest, sat in pious abstraction counting his beads with indifference, while his poor love-sick son was lonely seated on the minaret of the mosque in the agony of despair.

The distant sounds of the bridegroom's procession welled up the side of the hill from the valley beneath, and soon the hoofs of the horses,

the clatter of swords, and the firing of muskets, announced that the procession was at the threshold of the fort.

“The bridegroom cometh! go ye out to meet him!” said Abdullah as he buckled on his sword and with a quick step led his friends to the gateway of the fort, to welcome his future-son-in-law.

The Khan of Lalpura, who was a thick set little man of stunted growth and with decidedly pugged features, dismounted from his horse and having exchanged salutations took his seat on Abdullah’s right; Major Bernard having specially requested that he should not be introduced to the Mohmund chief, but retire and be allowed to view the ceremonies from the top of the watch-tower.

“Let the marriage ceremonies begin,” said Abdullah, addressing Ahmad the priest.

An attorney was selected to wait on Shaidy to obtain her consent.

The village barber, being best acquainted with the interior of the harem, was deputed to wait upon the bride.

“Silence gives consent” in Moslem law, and

therefore no difficulty was caused by Shaidy's reticence.

"Why don't you say 'no'?" said Ruhainah. "If I loved Yusuf as you do I would kill myself rather than marry another."

Shaidy hid her face and wept, and the village barber returned, and stated in due form that "Shaidy, the youngest daughter of Abdullah the exalted chief of Abukilla, had consented to marry Lateef the renowned chief of the Mohmunds."

"The dowry must be settled!" said the priest with great solemnity.

"I will settle upon her five thousand tilahs of pure gold, and a well, with one hundred acres of good land."

"*Afreen!* Well done!" exclaimed the numerous spectators. "The chief has behaved right generously regarding the family of the Rustum of Herat."

"Let the service proceed!" said Abdullah.

The priest then requested the bridegroom to stand in front of him and to recite the necessary prayers and confession of faith.

With a slight stammer, for the generous

chief was afflicted with an impediment in his speech, the bridegroom recited as follows :—

“ I desire forgiveness from God !

“ There is no God but God, and Mohamed is His Prophet !

“ I believe in God, in the angels, in the books, in the Prophets, in the day of judgment, and in the absolute decrees of the Almighty ! ”

The village barber, as Shaidy's agent, then seized the fat little hand of the stunted Mohmund chief and declared :—

“ In the presence of two witnesses and in consideration of the dowry already fixed, Shaidy the daughter of Abdullah consents to marry you. Do you consent ? ”

“ With all my heart, I consent ! I consent ! I consent ! ” replied the bridegroom.

Then raising his hands with great solemnity the priest said :—

“ O Great God ! grant that mutual love may reign between these two persons, even as it did exist between Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Joseph and Zulaikah, Moses and Ziporah, Mohamed and Ayesha, Aly and Fatimah. Ameen.”

"Ameen!" said Abdullah with great fervency.

"Ameen!" reiterated the bridegroom.

"Ameen!" exclaimed the whole company.

A slight titter was heard in the assembly as Shahbaz the jester echoed "Ameen" from the remotest corner of the court.

The wedding was over, and by this act Abdullah the Rustum of Herat had secured the friendship of the leading chieftain of the district.

There was a general shaking of hands and profuse congratulations on all sides, and the lucky little chief received an extra blessing as he placed in the priest's hand a liberal benefaction.

The leading minstrel marshalled his force of musicians and dancing girls as the palanquin was brought into the harem to bear away the sorrowful little bride.

"May God protect you, my child," said her mother.

"The Prophet's blessing rest upon you," said her aged father.

"God help you," exclaimed Ruhainah.

And Shaidy, taking one lingering look at the

distant minaret, stepped into the covered litter and was borne away on the shoulders of four of her father's slaves.

Major Bernard viewed the procession from the turret of the fort, but with very different feelings from those of the love-sick Yusuf who stood on the lofty minaret of his father's mosque. It was truly a picturesque sight as the marriage procession wended its way down the winding pathway which led from the village to the plains below. The wild warlike steps of the numerous retainers; the sweet strains of the lute; the fantastic dance of the Nautch girls; the beatings of drums; the clashing of cymbals; the bridegroom mounted on his prancing white steed, whose long drooping tail had been dyed red with henna, and the closed litter covered with gorgeous trappings, all combined to make it both an interesting and a novel spectacle to the foreign guest.

“This is not the only country in the world where girls are bought and sold, and there are ill-sorted matches in other countries than this,” said Bernard to himself as he descended from the turret.

Major Bernard retired to his "upper chamber," for he was glad to escape an introduction to the crowd of visitors. But he had not been long in his solitary chamber before he saw the eyes of the irrepressible little slave girl peeping through the crevice.

"This is a very dangerous game in a country like this," thought Bernard to himself. But the recollection of the captivating scene still lingered, and while discretion dictated that he should send Gulandamah away, love suggested that he should call her in. And love, as it generally does under such circumstances, gained the day.

"Only for a few minutes," he said as he opened the door noiselessly. "Only for a few minutes."

"Of course," said Gulandamah, flushed with the excitement of the day, and whose olive skin radiated with a beauty by no means to be despised.

"You must have had an exciting day, my little maid?"

"Very. I have not had a single moment's rest until now."

"Did your mistress send you?"

"No, I came to please myself."

"Now, tell me something about your mistress," Bernard said as he placed in her hand a couple of rupees. "Tell me the young lady's name."

"Ruhainah."

"But she is always spoken of as the 'Maid of Herat.' Why is this?"

"Because they all come from Herat, and because the old chief is so fond of her that he won't give her in marriage to any one."

"She is very fair."

"Have you seen her?"

"Of course I have."

"Oh fie, Major Sahib!" said the little damsel raising her finger; "how dare you look at us? The chieftain will kill you."

Bernard felt he had made a grave mistake in letting out the secret.

"You need not fear, Sahib! I shall never tell. My mistress likes you too much, and I like you too much ever to betray you."

"Does your mistress like me? She has never seen me."

"But she liked your verses. O Major Sahib!

I do so wish I could write. I should have lots of lovers if I could only write."

"It is a fortunate thing, my little damsel, that your education has been neglected, for you would certainly get into trouble. But tell me, who was Ruhainah's mother? She is very fair."

"Her mother was a Cashmeree, and the chief loved her more than all his other wives, and so when Ruhainah's mother died, he loved her daughter more than anybody else in the whole world; and I tell you, Major Sahib, if you fall in love with my mistress, the chief will kill you," and the slave girl laughingly drew her hand across her throat to give emphasis to her warning.

"It is not likely I shall fall in love with her."

"Yes, you will, if you go on peeping through that crevice day after day."

"Is she so beautiful?"

"Beautiful! Why every prince, sardar, and chief in the whole country wants to marry her; and mark my word," she said, raising her hand, "one of the Cabul princes will run away with her some day."

"Is she clever?"

"Clever! Why there is not a single thing she

cannot do. Do you admire that beautiful choga you have on? Ruhainah worked it. Did you enjoy your dinner last evening? Ruhainah cooked it. Do you ever hear beautiful music? It is Ruhainah's rebab. Have you ever heard a sweet voice? It is Ruhainah's voice as she soothes her father to sleep. Do you see this pretty cap of mine? Ruhainah embroidered it."

"Is the young lady who was married to-day as beautiful as her sister?"

"Far more beautiful, only her father does not think so. But listen, I hear the chieftain's footsteps, I must run away," and the bright little gad-about had scarcely closed the door when Abdullah entered.

"I am much fatigued after the excitement of the day, sir," the old man said, "but I hope all your wants are attended to. I must await the Ameer's instructions; till then remember my house is yours."

"To reside even for a day under the hospitable roof of the Rustum of Herat is to get a glimpse of the pleasures of paradise," and Major Bernard felt he was in truth not merely uttering an empty compliment.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE POISONED DISH.

“TELL me, Gulandamah, is he *very* handsome?” said Ruhainah, as she read once more the lines Bernard had sent her.

“Well! he is certainly better looking than the chief of Lalpura.”

“He must be brave! Even Alak says he is. He must love our race to risk his life as he did for his Afghan friend!”

“He evidently loves *some* of your race!” said Gulandamah, slyly.

“And he must be clever?”

“He speaks your language like an Afghan.”

“Oh, Gulandamah! *do* tell me more about him. You have simply told me nothing.”

“My sweet lady! what can I tell you?”

“Tell me something.”

“Well, then, to begin,” and the little slave held up her five fingers, and began to

count up the foreigner's graces. *First!* He is tall, exactly a hand's breadth taller than your noble father. *Second!* He has a long, flowing brown beard, exactly three shades darker than your own beautiful tresses. *Third!* His nose is turned in precisely the opposite direction to that of Shahbaz the Jester! Shahbaz's nose is always looking at the heavens, but the foreigner's is a fine, handsome nose, just like your father's. *Fourth!* He has the most beautiful pearly teeth set in the prettiest ruby mouth I have ever seen. *Fifth!* He has the softest and the most winning voice I have ever listened to. I had no idea that your poor little slave's name was so sweet and pretty until I heard the foreigner say Gul-an-da-a-mah!" And she imitated Bernard's voice.

"Go on, Gulandamah, you have still five fingers left on the other hand!" said Ruhainah, laughing at the little mimic.

"*Sixth!* He wears his mustache uncut, just like an infidel."

"Oh! Horrid!" exclaimed Ruhainah.

"Yes, it completely covers his lips. He couldn't give one a kiss if he wanted!"

"But go on, Gulandamah! You have still four fingers left."

"Well, my lovely mistress. *Seventh!* His skin is as fair as yours, and his cheeks are almost as rosy. *Eighth!* When he looks at one, his eyes seem to go right straight to one's very heart." And the little slave pointed to the region in which she thought the palpitating member resided.

"How interesting!" exclaimed Ruhainah. "But *please* don't stop."

"*Ninth!* When he laughs he shows his back teeth just as the Prophet did."

"Who told you the Prophet showed his back teeth?"

"Why, Yusuf did. He tells me I always laugh like the Prophet."

("Upon whom be peace," devoutly added Ruhainah.)

"But you have *ten* fingers! Now, *tenth!*" said Ruhainah, impatiently.

"Oh, dear me, what can I say? *Tenth!* *Tenth!* Well, *tenth!* Oh, my angelic mistress! he does look so *very, very* handsome in that beautiful choga which you worked for your

father for the last great festival. I cannot tell you anything more!"

And the little slave came and sat at Ruhainah's feet, as her mistress kissed her.

Gulandamah's amusing description of the foreigner had intensely interested Ruhainah, who would gladly have encouraged the girl to proceed, but the aged chieftain entered and seated himself beside his daughter, and lovingly took her hand, and Gulandamah left.

"Father! dear father! how feverish you are, and how anxious you look!"

"Yes, I *am* anxious, and there is much cause for it, my child!"

"Why?"

"The Englishman, who is my guest, shot the renowned brigand Hasan."

"Yes, I know it. It was indeed brave and noble of him to avenge the death of his friend, especially when that friend was of an alien race."

"True! True! My child! But blood for blood! A life for a life! Your brother is one of Hasan's fraternity. Do you understand?"

"Yes, father, I do. You mean that Alak is sworn to take the foreigner's life?"

"Verily, thou hast spoken the truth, my daughter!" said the old man solemnly.

"I know it, father! Already Alak has tried to make me poison the Englishman's food."

"Allah! Good God! Thou alone canst restrain the evil passions of men!" said her father.

"But I refused to obey him. I said, 'Alak, if you *must* take the infidel's life, do it as a warrior, and not as a base assassin.'"

"Ruhainah, my brave girl, thou didst speak nobly. As long as I hold this fort it shall not be the scene of foul assassination."

"Oh, take us all back to Herat!" exclaimed Rùhainah. "There is nothing but wrong and robbery, treason and murder in this horrid place."

"Have patience, my child. They are but the signs of the last days. Jesus will come and convert the whole world to Islam, and then all wrong shall cease. But till then, we must be resigned to our fate. But read me a little of Rahmān, my favorite poet, to divert my mind. Give me my old favorite, 'The Three are Just the Same,'" he said.

Ruhainah ran and brought a little stool, and seating herself beside the old man, as he reclined on his cot, read a few verses from the national poet of the Afghans, with a soft, sweet cadence on the concluding words of each couplet :—

“ The face of one’s beloved, the sun, the moon, all
three are just the same ;
Her figure, the cypress, and the fir-tree, all three
are just the same.

No need have I for honey, nor for sugared sweets,
Honey, sugar, and my mistress’ lips, all three are
just the same.

If I on my couch recline, of my true love bereft,
Lo ! fire, the bare earth, my couch, all three are
just the same.

May God ne’er cause my exile from His love to
know,
Tyranny, murder, and this exile, all three are just
the same.

The instant that a mortal from this world departs,
Black earth, white silver, gold, all three are just
the same.

When the devotee, in very truth, to devotion doth
resort,

A prince, a king, and he, all three are just the
same.

No one should wanderings make into a foreign
land,

For there blind, deaf, and one who sees, all three
are just the same.

In the stores and in the marts of jewellers who are
blind,

Glass beads, rubies, pearls, all three are just the
same.

Because of unwise rulers, who despotic tyrants are,
Hades, hell-fire, and Peshawur, all three are just
the same."

"Thank you, my child. How beautifully
you read; your voice is even more melodious
than the priest's when he recites the night
prayer."

"Oh! father, it is simply because you love
me that you think my voice so sweet," and she
placed her little hand upon his feverish fore-
head.

"Remember, Ruhainah, that last verse respecting Peshawur was written by our poet when the whole valley groaned under the tyranny of Moghal rule. These English (and as he spoke in suppressed tones, he looked in the direction of the upper chamber), these English do try to be just."

"Do they?" And the young maiden's thoughts wandered also in the direction of the upper chamber.

"I like this officer who has been sent to us; he is evidently a sincere and a truly brave man."

"I am glad you like him, father."

"Yes, I do; and although you are not interested in his mission" (Ruhainah thought she was), "I must tell you that it will all tend to establish my position as one of the leading counsellors of the Ameer."

"Is he an old man?" inquired Ruhainah, with affected indifference.

"Certainly not; he is just in the very prime of life."

"Father, do not leave me," she pleaded, as her father rose from his couch, "I do so want to talk with you."

"My presence is required in the guest-house," he said, and the chieftain bound his large white turban on his head, and taking his staff, returned to the outer court, to join his numerous guests.

Ruhainah and several of the slave girls soon began to make preparations for the evening meal of the principal guests, the other women of the household preparing the meal for those lady guests who had attended Shaidy's wedding. Very special attention was devoted by Ruhainah to the preparation of dishes for the rude foreigner who had dared to send love verses to an Afghan maiden he had never seen.

"Gulandamah! you must never go to the foreigner's room again. Such forwardness ill becomes even a serving-maid. Does he like his curry with red pepper?"

"How can I tell?" replied Gulandamah, sulkily.

"Did he enjoy the *peereence* I made yesterday?"

"Ask Alak."

"You must not be sulky, Gulandamah."

"Oh, my lady, I can never please you."

"Yes, my good girl, you always please me."

"Even when I go to see the foreigner?" asked Gulandamah.

"But you must be very careful, or you will be caught."

"Oh! my good mistress, if you had ever gazed on those eyes or listened to the soft, winning tones of that voice, you would feel as I do."

As the various dishes were arranged, Alak entered and asked for those specially prepared for the English guest; which his sister placed before him.

"How nicely you have cooked them," he said. "I will take them to the foreigner myself."

Ruhainah, suspecting treachery, watched her brother as he carried the dishes away. Alak paused at the door-way leading to the outer court and placing the tray on the ground he secretly dropped into the dish of *plau* the contents of a small packet.

Ruhainah's watchful eye witnessed the deed; but before she could reason with her brother, he had passed beyond the limits of the harem.

What could she do? In a few minutes the poisoned dish would be in the hands of the stranger in whom she had become so deeply interested.

“Gulandamah ! Gulandamah !”

But there was no response. The little slave girl was far away in the mosque drawing water at the well, and consoling poor Yusuf.

She had not a being to help her. She could not expect sympathy from the other women of the harem, for only Gulandamah knew her peculiar interest in the man whose life was now in peril. To delay was foul murder, for in a few more seconds he would eat of the poisoned dish and his blood would be on her own head. Nay, more, the world would say the Englishman had been poisoned by the hand of Ruhainah ! Madened by such a thought she sprang toward the staircase and was soon standing at the door to Bernard's chamber. Evening had set in, and the bright light within enabled her to see Bernard seated on the carpet with the poisoned dish before him.

She paused. “Thank God !” she said to herself, “he has not touched it. What a handsome face ! God help you !”

Bernard rose and unbuckling his sword and pistol placed them on his cot.

“God be praised! He will not eat! He suspects it is poisoned!” she thought. Fain would she open the door. But she was unveiled. In the hurry of her flight she had not even covered her head. Only think of her position! Never had she been allowed to speak to any man save to her aged father, and Alak, and Akbar the slave and the village barber!

Again she looked, and as she gazed on the handsome features of the foreigner the responsive throbbing of her heart told her now (even if she had not discovered it before), that she really loved.

“How I should like to speak to him!—I am sure he would be kind!—He would not injure me, and I should then hear the voice which has so charmed my slave!”—And yet she had heard that English officers were very wicked! He might seize her and take her away! And what if Alak found her there? Why he would kill them both!—Such were her dreamy musings as she watched Bernard through the crevice in the door. When to her horror she saw him

seat himself once more on the carpet, and, having raised his hands in the act of invocation, dip his fingers into the poisoned dish.

The life of a human being was in her power,—her father's guest—the only man she had ever felt she loved. Not a moment must be lost. As quick as thought she thrust open the door, and with bare arm, and unveiled face, pointed to the poisoned dish.

"It is death," she cried, and fell senseless on the floor.

Not a being was near, and in his room alone was none other than the beautiful and mysterious Maid of Herat! The lovely daughter of his hospitable host! Bernard at once realized the true peril of his position. If discovered with the chieftain's daughter in his chamber no power on earth could save him, for the whole community would be enraged. Bolting the outer door he at once endeavored to lift her almost lifeless figure and carry it outside to the roof of the harem, when to his relief Gulandamah appeared and assisted her young mistress. "God bless you," Bernard said as he released her slender form and placed her on a rug which

Gulandamah had spread just outside the doorway, "God bless you, my own guardian angel," he said. And he felt the loving pressure of her hand as he parted from her and quietly closed the door.

Such noble and disinterested conduct on the part of so beautiful a creature as Ruhainah was of itself enough to draw out the strongest feelings in such a chivalrous nature as that of Bernard. But there was an expression in her eyes as she seemed to awake to consciousness which had enslaved his very soul.

What true nobility of character! and what simplicity! what grace! what a child of nature! Such were the thoughts which passed through Bernard's mind as he seated himself on his couch and mused upon the romantic scene which had just been enacted.

"I am clearly in an awkward position, a position which I suppose most fellows of a romantic turn of mind would envy, but it seems highly probable that I shall meet with the usual fate of an Englishman in this horrid country."

His contemplations were interrupted by the arrival of Alak, who found the dish of *plau*

untouched, and the officer firmly holding his revolver.

"You have eaten little, sir," said the young man, as he removed the dishes and gave them to his servant.

"That dish of *plau* was too highly seasoned," said Bernard looking significantly at Alak, "You can leave me alone for the night!" Sullenly did Alak retrace his steps. His plot had been discovered. How? He could not tell! Not for a single moment did he suspect the interposition of his sister.

"These foreigners are said to be masters of necromancy. It must be by some occult science that he discovered the poison," he thought as he descended the staircase and secretly made away with the poisoned dish.

In the inner court of the harem Ruhainah reclined to all appearance in vacant abstraction, but in reality she was vividly recalling the strange incident of her visit to Bernard's chamber. To Bernard, and even to Gulandamah, she had appeared unconscious, but she had a distinct recollection of everything that had occurred. And yet it all seemed a dream

or vision. The strange impulse which forced her to forget all rules of Afghan etiquette, and to stand before a foreigner, and an unbeliever, unveiled.—The strong arms which so tenderly and gently raised her from the ground.—The intelligent handsome face which gazed so kindly upon her.—The fervent blessing which came from the stranger's lips as they parted.—And the responsive pressure of his hand, of which she had been truly guilty! The whole scene all came back to her and she felt that never in her whole life had she been conscious of such emotions.—It was love!—Passionate love! Such as she had often read of in books and poems, but such as she had never realized before. And then taking her little lamp she read again and again Bernard's lines which now had obtained their fullest meaning:—

“Prudence sets great store by name and fame,
Love casteth both away.”

It was no dream! It was no romance! It was real life! She had offered both her “name and fame” at the shrine of an unlawful love!

“To love an infidel! one who curses our

Prophet ! who despises our holy book ! who eats pork ! who cuts his mushtache in an unlawful way ! what a dreadful sin ! it must not be ! far better to be like poor Shaidy than to love, and to marry an infidel ! ”

“ It *must* not be,” and yet it *was*. And so fervently, and so passionately did the flame of pure love burn in the fair maiden’s heart, that she could not rest.

Restless, and unable to sleep, she sought solace in the service of song ; and taking her rebab, in the sweetest softest strains she sang :—

“ Deem not thou, the maiden blush
Ne’er can mantle this pale cheek.
Since in vain I strive to hush
Thoughts that speak.

Love for thee o’erweighs my soul,
Mocks each sober calm intent :
Places will beyond control,
Shame can naught prevent.

Yet if seeming bold to thee,
Blindly led by gentle wiles ; —
Stranger eyes shall never see
How this spell beguiles.

Let me seek the woodland's shade,
Where soft winds shall bear my woe :
Hope may spring amid the glade ;
Tears may cease to flow."

Bernard listened to the dulcet sounds of Ruhainah's song as they came through the silent night and penetrated even the stillness of his lonely chamber, but hardly did he realize that those words in any way expressed the young maiden's feelings toward himself. The extreme danger of his position was, of itself, enough to absorb his thoughts ; still, ever and anon, those sweet loving eyes, and that soft subtile form, would pass before his vision, as he pictured her standing erect before him, her face unveiled, and her arm uncovered, as she pointed to the poisoned dish.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE OILY HINDU.

MAJOR BERNARD felt he must lose no time in taking some steps to secure his own safety. For, however friendly the chief of Abukilla might be, it was very evident the old man could not control the actions of his son.

By means of a liberal bribe, he summoned to his presence the oily specimen of humanity known as "Nand Ram the shopkeeper." They had met before, in former years, when Bernard had employed the Hindu as a spy on the British frontier.

"*Bandagee*, at your service," said Nand Ram, as he stood in a cringing attitude, with folded hands and lowly bow. "What is your honor's command?"

"Be seated. I am glad to see you. It is a long time since we last met. How are you getting on?"

"Sir! it was bad enough in those days when the honest efforts of your honor's slave were but little appreciated, but here I am simply between two fires."

"What is the matter?"

"Treachery all around, sir. Not a man or woman to be trusted. The old chief is honest enough, but he has treachery in his own family. His son Alak, and the young Sheenwaree wife have turned the whole place into a state of purgatory."

"You must have a bad time of it then."

"It is difficult for a man of my integrity to serve three masters. I try to be a faithful servant of your government; I have to keep in with the Ameer; and I endeavor to serve the interests of my own chief, for there is not a better man in the whole country than Abdullah."

"And I have not the least doubt you manage it all with admirable tact and skill."

The Hindu acknowledged the compliment with a salaam.

"Tell me," said Bernard, "what is the matter between Abdullah and his young wife?"

"Simply this. An old man of seventy has married a young girl of sixteen, and she is playing the very devil. But, perhaps, you are not aware that the supreme influence in the old chieftain's harem is that of his favorite daughter?"

"Well?"

"And the old man won't marry her to any one."

"Well, what of that?"

"Why, it is considered by all of us a disgrace that a young maiden of seventeen years should be unbetrothed."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, and what is more, the chief of the Sheenwaree tribe demands her in marriage."

"Can you tell me anything regarding this young girl?" said Bernard affecting indifference.

Nand Ram drew near, and whispered :

"Her name is Ruhainah. Her mother was a Cashmere lady of great beauty, whom, it is said, Abdullah killed in a fit of jealousy. But some say she is the daughter of a Sudozie princess of royal lineage. It is impossible to tell which

is the true story, for this is an age in which men never speak the truth."

"But what is your own impression?"

"I am inclined to believe the Cashmere story."

"Why?"

"Because it accounts for the great love the old man bears the girl. He loves her because he killed her mother."

"Have you ever seen her?"

"No, but I am told she is a maiden of the most marvellous beauty."

"But you cannot always believe these reports," said Bernard anxious to conceal his real interest in Ruhainah.

"Of course you cannot. But even Nurejan, the chief's young wife, says she is very lovely."

"Then you see Nurejan sometimes?" inquired Bernard slyly.

"Of course I do. She is my chief agent. Her friendships and her intrigues are so many that I find her as good as a dozen spies."

"Then you are admitted into the harem?"

"No, she comes to my shop to make purchases."

"But I thought ladies in this country never went abroad?"

"Bless your life, they all do it. Veiled in a bourka, who can tell who visits the shop of Nand Ram?" and the Hindu chuckled.

"Is Alak Ruhainah's *own* brother?"

"No, by a different mother."

"He seems to be a young scoundrel."

"Yes. Have you seen the red henna spot in the palm of his hand? Alak is a member of the Guild of the Red Hand."

"The chief of which I shot the other day?"

"Yes, I heard of it. I am sorry you lost Dilawar. He was a faithful man."

"Have you heard from Cabul?"

"I have just got a secret dispatch. They are difficult to get in these days. Look here."

And he unrolled a small piece of pink tissue paper, written all over in mystic characters.

"Look at this, sir," he said holding up the precious little document. "The runner who brought this was seized by one of the Ameer's secret police and stripped to the skin, but the paper could not be found."

"I suppose he had sewn it in the sole of his shoe?" suggested Bernard.

"O! no—that is too old a game. The fellow hid it in his nostril, and swore in the Prophet's name that he was a poor student. You see, sir, my business is a dangerous one. Three of my runners have been murdered this year."

"Have you any news from the Ameer regarding myself?" inquired Bernard.

"Yes, his highness will invite you to Cabul."

"But my life is not safe in this place a single day."

"Then leave the fort at once."

"That is impossible. As soon as Alak knows my determination he will take my life. He has already attempted to poison me."

"I know it. But listen to me! If you want to escape you can do it to-night."

"How?"

"On one condition I will tell you."

"What are your terms?"

"That you breathe not a word of what I am going to tell you to a single member of the chieftain's household. To no one, in fact."

"I will swear."

"Swear in the name of God and His Prophet."

"But I am a Christian."

"Then kiss the *Injeel*."

"I do not possess a New Testament, all my baggage has been stolen."

"Say Rām Rām."

"I cannot swear as an idolater. I give you my word, and that must be enough."

"Scarcely."

"I can also add a promise of thousand rupees, if that will satisfy you?"

"Sir, we have a profound respect for an Englishman's word, but we like his rupees better!"

"The thousand rupees shall be paid upon my safe return to India."

"Then listen, Major Sahib! I told you that Nurejan, the chief's young wife, often visits me. Well, yesterday she informed me that to-night, *this very night*, will Musa, the chief of her tribe, attack the fort and carry off the beautiful Maid of Herat."

"Abdullah must be told of this."

"Stay, sir! Have you not promised to keep my secret?"

"True. It shall be faithfully kept."

"My sole reason for divulging the plot to you is this: You can escape during the disturbance. There will be a great deal of noise, but this will be of no consequence to you, you will not care to interfere in the matter. Let these Afghans fight their own battles. And escape for your life."

"But how can this be arranged?"

"Sleep with your weapons by your side. Your white Arab charger shall be ready saddled by the time you reach the court-yard. Keep out of Alak's way, and ride for your very life to Jalalabad."

Little did the treacherous Hindu realize what feelings of consternation he had excited in the breast of the Englishman as he coolly related the plot for Ruhainah's abduction.

"Nand Ram, you are an excellent fellow. Listen! I have promised you a thousand rupees. But you shall have more if you will make known to me the whole plot."

"But remember, you must not tell a single being."

"I have promised."

"Listen! *Our* plans are these."

"Then *you* are party to the plot?"

"Of course I am! Hence the condition that you keep the whole thing secret. My dear sir!" said the Hindu, placing his hand on Bernard's in a confidential manner, "my dear sir! Much as Nand Ram loves your honor's *gold*, he loves his *life* better!"

"I quite understand that, my friend! But proceed."

"Well, our scheme is as follows: To-night, when they are all fast asleep, Nurejan will secretly unfasten the door of the fort, and Musa, the Sheenwaree chief, will enter with an armed band. Outside the harem I shall place a ladder whereby Musa can descend with his Ruhainah." And the old villain chuckled at the thought of his taking part in so romantic an enterprise. "Now, sir, while Musa and I are settling matters with the fair lady you can be far on your way to Jalalabad. There you will find my brother Rām Dās who will help you on your way to Cabul."

"Nand Ram," said Bernard coaxingly, "I will reward you handsomely if you will let

me divulge the whole plot to the young lady."

"What!" exclaimed the Hindu, "would you, a foreigner and an alien, dare to violate the sanctity of your host's harem, and converse with a young Afghan maiden whom you have never seen? No, sir! Such is not the custom of this country. Take care of yourself, my noble sir, and leave these Afghans to settle their own affairs. Don't, for your life's sake, touch their women or you are a dead man!"

Bernard saw the Hindu was immoveable, and that if he wished to serve Ruhainah it must not be by divulging the secret.

"At what time will the attack on the fort be made?" he inquired.

"Not until early morn, just about the time that Ahmad ascends the minaret to give the call to prayer. The people sleep soundest in the morning, and besides this, it is impossible for horsemen to escape down the rugged pathway until the break of day."

Bernard felt that if Nand Ram remained longer he might betray more interest in Ruhainah's affairs than was consistent with his

position as a mere traveller. He therefore reluctantly gave him permission to depart.

In a few minutes Abdullah entered and cheerfully saluted his guest.

"You must find it lonely in this room, Major Sahib! But you see I am afraid to expose your life among a wild and ungovernable set of people like mine."

"It is very thoughtful of you to be so solicitous regarding my safety," said Bernard, "but I am naturally anxious to see a little more of the people than I have already done. Travellers usually journey for the sake of sight seeing!"

"And for obtaining information!" added Abdullah significantly. "But I have come to tell you that in the course of a few days you may expect an invitation from Cabul. However, if you want to see a little of our village life, you can do so this evening, for I have a large number of guests from all parts of the country, and as my daughter's nuptials are scarcely over, we intend to have a special gathering. You will then see something of Afghan life."

CHAPTER XV.

THE GUEST-CHAMBER.

AT sunset, when the toils of the day were over, the villagers and their chief assembled in the guest-chamber of the fort to pass the evening with their friends in joyous merriment and social intercourse.

A prominent personage in the festive gathering was Ahmad, the village priest, whose reputation as a poet exceeded that of any living Afghan, and whose genial qualities made him a welcome visitor to the Hujrah of the fort.

Seated beside the priest was Shahbaz, the jester, who in more prosperous days had enlivened even the revels of princes.

Then, there were strangers from the almost unknown regions of Central Asia, now on their way to Bombay to embark on the Meccan pilgrimage; merchants, with grapes and dried

fruits for Calcutta ; coolies seeking employment in India ; Mohmund and Sheenwaree villagers, and Khyber robbers ; and, above all, the village minstrels helped to form the motley group.

Akbar, the slave, handed round the pipe to the heterodox, and supplied pure spring water to the thirsty souls of the faithful.

"Are you fond of our music?" inquired Abdullah of Bernard.

"Your band performed with commendable vigor at your daughter's wedding," Bernard replied, "but I have heard too little to give an opinion as to its merits. It reminds me of the bagpipes of Scotland."

"Ah, those soldiers in petticoats," said Abdullah, "they look like dancing girls, but, by the Prophet, they fight like fiends."

"What have you specially good in music?" inquired Abdullah of the chief minstrel.

"Did you ever hear *Zakhmee*, sir? It is a new tune by that famous poet Meera."

"You don't call Meera a poet," exclaimed Ahmad. "He is but a mere rhymer."

"Reverend sir ! may my life be sacrificed for

you! I dare not hazard an opinion as to Meera's excellence as a poet, "but this tune of his will be sung when our names are forgotten."

"After your exalted name is forgotten," said the jester. "But please remember that the names of Ahmad and Shahbaz will be fresh and green when your lutes and lyres are as silent as the cold earth. Although "the rose bloom long it bloometh not forever," as our great poet saith.

"Well, give us a little of *Zakhmee*," said the chieftain.

Marshalled by a few vigorous strokes on the drum the minstrels took their lutes and rebabs and with the greatest animation played the popular air, as Shahbaz the jester kept time with his hands and lips.

Zakhmee, which has since had a world-wide fame, ran thus :—





"*Afreen, Afreen!* Well done!" shouted the whole party, "there is not a minstrel equal to Meera even in Persia itself."

"It is strange that our Prophet forbade music," said an old white-bearded traveller enjoying a vigorous pull at the pipe in a distant corner of the chamber.

"The injunction rests on a disputed tradition of the Prophet's sayings," remarked the priest, "but it is almost certain that his majesty forbade smoking," he added, smiling at the old man.

"And yet, how common smoking has become," said Abdullah. "In these days both saints and sinners use tobacco."

"But the Akhund of Swat has forbidden smoking," said a young student.

"Yes, and even snuff," said Shahbaz the jester, looking at Mullah Ahmad, who was an inveterate snuff-taker. "But cheer up, boys. Let us have another song."

"I would like to put a question to this assembly, if I may," said a poor student in tatters.

"No! Let us have the song," said several.

"Let the young man put his question," said Abdullah with authority.

"Well, sir, it is a question of arithmetic. A few days ago I and a young friend of mine were seated on the floor of our mosque dining off eight loaves of bread,—three of which were mine and five belonging to my fellow student,—when a rich traveller came that way and begged that he might join us in our frugal repast. We consented, and we all three ate equally. When our rich friend departed he generously threw us eight rupees. Of course, I expected to share and share alike. But my fellow student will only give me three rupees, one for each loaf and insists upon keeping five rupees himself."

“ It is shameful ! ” exclaimed the guests, “ he should certainly give you half the money.”

“ Stay ! ” said Mullah Ahmad, assuming the dignity of a judge. “ Stay, my young friend ! if you want it decided according to strict justice, verily thou shouldest take three rupees and be grateful, for of a truth only one rupee is thy just due. That is correct, is it not, sir ? ” he said, turning to Major Bernard.

The poor student was bewildered, and began to calculate the sum on his five fingers.

“ I will explain the sum for you, young man,” said the priest. “ You were three persons with eight loaves and you ate equally ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Then if each loaf were divided, there would be eight shares falling to the lot of each, making twenty-four shares in all ? ”

“ Yes, certainly.”

“ The traveller then ate seven portions belonging to thy fellow student and only one belonging to thee. Thou art therefore only entitled to one rupee. That is justice.”

“ Verily, thou art a Solomon ! ” exclaimed Shahbaz.”

“Mullah Ahmad is correct,” said Bernard.

The poor student was still calculating the twenty-four shares on his five fingers, when a tall thin man in a camels' hair choga with a thin voice said: “A strange story reaches us from the mountains of Terah.”

“What is that?” inquired several.

“Why, a man in the village of Gamoo was murdered, and his next of kin was a beautiful maiden of some fourteen years, his only daughter. And, by the Prophet, she insisted upon being the avenger of blood. The assassin was caught, brought into the fair maiden's presence, and let loose, and then the young girl sprang upon him like a lioness and plunged her dagger into the murderer's heart.”

“Those Terah girls have the spirit of tigresses,” said one of the guests.

“They are not to be compared with the Khutak girls,” said Mullah Ahmad. “Why only the other day a Khutak maid was forced to marry against her will, and she plunged a dagger into the bridegroom's breast the very moment she saw him.”

“Moulavie Sahib,” said Abdullah anxious

to change the subject, for he thought of his little Shaidy, "tell the major your famous story of the ascetic from Cabul."

"Once upon a time, so the story runs," said the priest, "there lived a saintly man who having spent many years alone in the desert, in severe penance and ascetic mortification, determined to see a little more life, and he came to the city of Cabul."

"Where there is enough wickedness even to satisfy Pharaoh, king of Egypt," added Shahbaz.

"Well, he came to the city of Cabul, and there in the great market place *which the English destroyed*," he said, looking at Major Bernard, "he found himself in the midst of the din and bustle of the world, and a gay and thoughtless round of revelry and pleasure. Feeling much oppressed and tired, he begged permission to sleep in front of a tradesman's shop. But as he lay down to slumber he said to himself: 'How shall I know that I am myself when I awake amid all this noise and excitement?' A sudden thought struck him. He had some pumpkins in his scarf, and taking one of them he tied it to his leg, and said he :

‘Now, when I awake I shall know that I am myself, when I see the pumpkin.’ But, a certain wag passed that way, and beholding the gourd tied to the good man’s leg unloosed it, and tied it to his own, and fell asleep beside the saint. The ascetic awoke, and seeing the pumpkin fastened to the leg of another man, in bewilderment, exclaimed :

“ ‘Whether I be I or no ?

If I, the pumpkin why on you ?

If you ? then where am I ? and who ? ’ ”

“ *Shahbash ! Afreen !* well done ! ” exclaimed the party, in which Bernard joined.

“ This story is really told,” said the priest, “ by the Persian poet Jāmi, but I have given an Afghan version of it.”

“ Yes,” said Bernard, “ I remember reading it in my Persian studies. Those are fine sentiments of the poet where he says :—

“ ‘ Celestial beauty seen

He left the earthly : and once came to know

Eternal love, he let the mortal go.’ ”

Shahbaz the jester was about to favor the

convivial party with a song, when the whole audience was hushed into solemn silence as the plaintive voice of young Yusuf gave forth the call to prayer from the minaret of the mosque:—

“God is great !

“There is no God but God !

“Mohamed is His prophet !

“Come to prayer !

“Come to salvation !”

And as the melancholy notes were heard floating through the air in the stillness of the cool moonlit evening, the old chieftain of Abukilla raised his hands in fervent supplication and said : “O thou great God ! I have no power or strength but in Thee !”

“*Ameen*,” said the priest.

Abdullah and his guests adjourned to the mosque for night prayer, and Major Bernard accompanied by Alak went to the upper chamber.

Closing the door, Bernard, seizing his revolver, placed his hand on Alak's shoulder, and presenting the muzzle of his pistol to the young man's heart, he said with firmness :

“Young man, listen ! by a secret influence

unknown to you I am aware that you are attempting to take my life. To poison me, in fact ! ”

Alak grew deadly pale and trembled.

“ Now remember,” Bernard continued. “ I am not afraid to die. I have often in my life faced death. But I want you to understand that it is only in consideration of your father ” (Bernard had almost said “ your sister ”), “ that I spare your life. Or, by God ! you would lie dead at my feet this very moment.”

“ Sir ! ” said Alak, releasing himself from Bernard’s iron grip. “ Sir ! I have a vow upon me. The Avenger of Blood is, as you know, an institution of our religion and of our country. I am a member of Hasan’s guild, and I must avenge his death.”

“ Avenge it then as a man of courage, and not as an assassin.”

“ You shall be safe,” said Alak, “ as long as you are my father’s guest.”

“ On one condition do I spare you : you shall taste every dish you offer me.”

Alak, having left, Bernard was preparing for the eventful night, when his door gently

opened, and there stood before him a tall, spare man, clad in a sheepskin coat, and armed with pistol, sword and dagger.

"I am late, sir," said the stranger in a husky voice, "but now all true Moslems are prostrate in the mosque, I have come to obtain your assistance."

"Sit down. What is the nature of your request?"

"Sir, the chief's son says you are an adept in all the learned sciences."

"Oh! he has made that discovery, has he?" said Bernard, smiling.

"Well, sir! I have no doubt you have studied chemistry?"

"Yes, a little."

"Sir! have you such a thing as a poison, which, if put into a man's food, would not take effect until a few days afterward?"

"I have no medicines with me. But may I ask, for what purpose you want it?"

"I want to poison my enemy?"

"And you want me to assist you in a foul murder? Are you not ashamed of yourself?" exclaimed Bernard, in anger.

"Don't be angry," pleaded the stranger. "If you will only listen to me, I will tell you why I want that poison, and you will then see that, after all, I am not such a bad man as you think me."

"I am open to conviction," replied Bernard. "Proceed!"

"Well, sir, some years ago an enemy of mine sought to take my life, and one night he came to my dwelling when we were all asleep outside our houses. Creeping stealthily to my cot he plunged his dagger into the quilt. But it happened that I was not sleeping on my charpoy that night. But my favorite daughter was. And the villain's dagger had pierced the heart of my beloved child. Well, sir! I swore over the bleeding body of my murdered child that I would avenge her death, and for several years I endeavored to take that man's life. And one day he came into my presence and begged for mercy."

"And you forgave him?"

"Yes, I did. But you know, sir, an Afghan never forgives. And take that man's life I will. Now, when Alak told me that you were a

master of alchemy, I thought to myself 'Then he can give me the very poison I want.' Now, if you could give me poison which would take effect about a week after it is administered, I would invite that fellow to dinner, and drop a little into his food. He would go home and die. And not a soul would know who killed him. I should then have my revenge, and yet pass as a man of honor among my tribe."

"You Afghans are certainly a strange people," said Bernard. "You call yourselves '*Bene Israel*,' but some of you must be '*Bene Shai-tān*'?"

"Yes," said the stranger; "that man for whom I wanted the poison is truly a son of Satan."

"But there are angels among you," said Bernard to himself as he thought of the fair girl whom he was determined to rescue that very night.

"You may leave," he said to the husky stranger, as he opened the door.

The door secured, Bernard armed himself for the night. At any cost, even at the peril of his own life, should Ruhainah's honor be defended.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ABDUCTION.

THE village watchman was wearing weary with the night watch, as the cock-crowing announced the dawning of the morn; and the village priest had scarcely given forth the morning call "prayers are better than sleep" when a huge stone hurled from a distance felled the faithful sentinel to the ground.

Musa, the Sheenwaree chief, and a band of violent men, then entered the door of the fort, and were soon engaged in a deadly conflict with Alak and his father's sturdy retainers.

Taking advantage of the confusion in the outer court, Musa entered the harem, and, by a single sword-cut laid Abdullah helpless on his bed, as Nurejan the arch-traitress hid her treachery amid the most frantic yells of "*wai, wai.*"

"Help!" shouted Gulandamah rushing into

Bernard's room. But the chamber was unoccupied ; the officer had descended to the Hujrah in search of his Arab charger, and was not to be found.

There was some delay, as Major Bernard had to carefully avoid detection. And, in the meantime, Musa the Sheenwaree chief had seized Ruhainah and with Nand Ram's assistance carried her from the roof to the outside of the fort.

Bernard found his white Arab charger, as Nand Ram had promised, ready saddled, and mounting his horse galloped out of the fort, and was soon in hot pursuit of the man who held possession of the beautiful maiden he so passionately loved.

Musa had a fair start of his pursuer, and it was fully a half an hour's race before Bernard came upon the Sheenwaree chief with his helpless burden.

Holding Ruhainah's slender form in front of him on the saddle, Musa was urging his horse at frantic speed when the Englishman came within a few paces of him.

"Stop!" cried Bernard, "or I will fire."

He had scarcely uttered the words when two bullets from Musa's pistol whizzed past his head.

"Stop! or I will fire," repeated Bernard.

"Fire! you infidel! Fire!" cried Musa as he held the helpless form of Ruhainah before him.

Ruhainah, hearing a voice, awoke to consciousness and by a desperate effort freed herself from Musa's grasp and fell senseless to the earth. As quick as thought Bernard engaged the chief in close combat.

English officers are not as used to single combat as an Afghan warrior, and Musa had the manifest advantage in the weight of his weapon. Bernard was clearly losing ground, when he remembered a favorite thrust he had learned at college, and drawing his charger a few paces back rushed with fury upon his opponent and pierced his heart.

"Allah!" cried Musa, as he fell dead on the ground.

A scream of horror escaped the lips of Ruhainah, as she beheld the chief stretched lifeless on the cold earth.

Major Bernard was now in sole possession

of the Fair Maid of Herat. He gently raised her from the ground, and Ruhainah, clad in the milk-white folds of the modest garment which so artfully concealed the fair proportions of her graceful form, lay on his manly breast, as her luxuriant tresses, wafted in the morning breeze, covered the brave arm which had so nobly defended her honor and her life.

Softly and stealthily opening her beautiful eyes Ruhainah beheld the gallant knight who had fought so bravely in her cause, and endeavoring to release herself from his impassioned embrace, she exclaimed :

“ O Sahib ! is it you ? ”

“ Yes, my little rose, it is I.”

“ Where is my father ? Where is Alak ? ”

“ God alone knows. I left them defending the fort.”

“ But are we alone ? ”

“ Yes,” and Bernard was conscious that she clung to him for protection, as he uttered the simple monosyllable.

“ Ruhainah,” he said, addressing her by name.

“ Ruhainah, you must trust yourself to me.”

“ But you foreigners are so wicked ! My

father has often told me the dreadful things you did in Cabul."

"We are not all bad," said Bernard smiling at the girl's simplicity. "At all events you are alone and there is not a soul to help you. *You* saved my life, and now I have saved yours. You *must* trust me." And he tenderly kissed her hand.

"Indeed I will," and she nestled so confidently and trustfully beneath his long flowing beard.

"You will take me to my father, won't you?"

"Of course I will. Do you think I am going to run away with you?"

"Oh! I was so frightened. The villain seized me when I was asleep and put his hand on my mouth and I could not give the alarm," she said, as she put her head on his lap and wept.

"Don't cry, my dear little maid. I will put you on my horse and walk by your side, and take the greatest care of you."

"But some of Musa's followers will soon be here, and they will kill you and carry me away," she rejoined.

"Don't be afraid, my little rose, I think I am ready for them," and Bernard seized his revolver.

"How brave you are!" she said, looking at him with tearful eyes, and with an expression of undisguised pride and admiration. "Why, you are as brave as the 'Rustum of Herat.' But it is very wrong for me to stay with you, Major Sahib, alone in this place," she added, releasing herself from Bernard's warm embrace coquettishly.

Tenderly covering her with his large sheep-skin coat, he lifted her to his charger and they proceeded slowly in the direction of the fort.

"Listen! they are coming! Oh! what shall I do?" she cried with alarm.

A cloud of dust in the distance clearly indicated the rapid approach of horsemen.

"Ruhainah! can you fire a pistol?" he said, handing his revolver.

"Yes," she replied, her eyes flashing with determination. "I once helped in defending our caravan on the way from Herat."

"My brave girl! then stay where you are,

hold tight on the horse, and as they approach fire into them, and then gallop for your life."

"And what will you do?"

"Kill the rest. Take good aim as they come in sight, my dear girl." Bernard stood amazed as he saw the delicate young girl resolutely prepare herself for the attack with all the coolness and deliberation of a trained warrior.

But the alarm was needless, for the party consisted of her brother Alak and six mounted retainers.

"*Afreen ! Afreen !*" shouted Alak, as he saw his sister on Bernard's horse. "Where is the Kāfir?"

"There," said Bernard pointing to the bleeding corpse of the dead chief.

"The foreigner is a good shot," said Alak, addressing his men, as they dismounted and offered Bernard one of their horses. "But let us return to the fort without delay. We must keep all together, for at any moment we may be attacked."

They rode fast, and Bernard saw that the plucky Afghan girl could not only fire a pistol,

but ride a somewhat restive steed under the most trying circumstances.

"Your sister will be tired," he said to Alak.

"No, she won't be very tired," replied Alak. "It is not the first time she has ridden. My father taught her to ride, for the old man always said that in a country like this we never knew when we should have to flee for our very lives. The 'Rustum of Herat,' sir, is a remarkable man, but I am afraid the good old saint's hours are numbered."

"Why?"

"He is badly wounded."

* * * * *

After a brisk ride, they entered the fort. Dismayed attendants were running in every direction in the wildest excitement, and the whole place presented a scene of carnage which told with what desperate resistance Alak and his men had defended the fort. Not fewer than eight of Musa's followers lay stretched dead on the ground, while five more were prisoners bound hand and foot, and suffering from the most ghastly wounds.

Alak tenderly lifted his sister from her horse, when she ran hastily into the inner court of the harem, where she found the old chieftain lying on his couch dangerously wounded.

“Father! father, speak!”

“Is that Ruhainah? Thanks be to God! O lift me up.” And the women in attendance raised his pillows.

“Dear child,” he said, placing his trembling hand upon his daughter’s head, “my dear child, my race is nearly run. It is God’s will; we cannot resist the decrees of the Almighty.”

“Oh, father! You won’t die! You must not die! Ruhainah cannot live without her father!”

“*Wai! wai!*” shouted the Sheenwaree wife in feigned grief, when the whole company of wives and slaves raised a mournful wail of lamentation, and beat their breasts and tore their hair in the wildest excitement.

“Silence!” said Alak, “this is not the time for lamentation. The Rustum of Herat is not dead yet.”

“Where is the Englishman?” exclaimed Abdullah.

‘Outside in the Hujrah.’

“Bring him here instantly,” said Abdullah.

“O father! do not be angry with him, it was not his fault. He saved my life, indeed he did.”

“Peace, my child! I know it, but I must see him before I die. Send the women away.”

“Must I leave also?” said Alak.

“No, you must stay as a witness, and so must Mullah Ahmad, for in the presence of two witnesses my word will be established.”

With a firm step, and with his hand on the hilt of his sword Major Bernard entered the harem and approached the couch on which Abdullah lay.

Abdullah extending his hand whispered, “Thou art, of a truth, a true Afghan.”

Bernard knelt by his bed and taking the chief’s hand said, “Sir, this is the proudest day of my life.”

And as he said the words his eyes met those of Ruhainah. It was that sweet look which had so captivated him from the very first and which reminded him of past years.

“Major Sahib! I am dying! The angel of

death is waiting to discourse with me, and my time is short. There are several things I must tell you before I die."

"If they are secrets of state had we better not be alone?" said Bernard.

"That is not necessary. Nay, rather it is of great importance that my words be affirmed by witnesses.

"Listen, Ruhainah! listen, Alak!"

The dying man became unconscious, ere he could say more. The whole four, Bernard, Ruhainah, Alak and the priest, waited with almost breathless anxiety. Would the secret, after all, die with him?

Gradually he returned to consciousness.

"Alak, raise me! Ruhainah, kiss me, my child! My *last* kiss!"

"O no, my father, not your *last*."

"Yes, Ruhainah, my *last*," he said with great emphasis. "My *last* kiss. Major, listen! This girl, whose honor you have so bravely protected at the risk of your own life, is *not* my child. God knows I have loved her as my own. But she is *not* mine. She belongs to your race—she is English."

“No, my father! I am not English! I am your own child!” cried Ruhainah, as she flung herself upon the old man and wept in agony, kissing his lips over and over again.

“Listen, Ruhainah! for my breath fails me. Listen, Major Sahib! It is now seventeen years or more since the Afghans destroyed the whole British army in Cabul. And in the Jug-dalak pass on the 12th of January, 1842, for I remember the Christian date, we had a terrible death struggle. I was one of Akbar Khan’s captains, and, as I was urging on my men I was suddenly seized by an English officer and dragged to the ground. He fired. The Englishman fired (and Abdullah raised his sleeve and exhibited a bullet mark on his left arm), and in self-defence I plunged my dagger into his side. He lingered for a few minutes, and before he died he said, ‘Spare my little child, she is there under that rock in charge of a Hindu servant,’ and he breathed his last.

“The child I found in the snow, in the stifened arms of a native nurse, who had died from the cold. I took the little creature into my arms, and, as I kissed her, she placed her tiny

fingers into my long beard, stained as it was with her father's blood, and smiled. The child won my heart. And she has ever from that moment loved me with the truest devotion—that child is Ruhainah."

Ruhainah let go the chief's hand with a look of terror. And then clinging to his neck wept aloud. • "O my dear good father! You are the only father I have ever known. I love you still and I shall ever love you!"

"Peace, Ruhainah! this hand is stained with your father's blood—still, God knows, I did it in self-defence. And Alak is witness that I have loved you with even more than a father's love."

The dying man sunk into unconsciousness and it was evident it was near the end. Ruhainah lovingly bathed his forehead with rose-water, as the priest prepared to recite the offices for the dying, when suddenly Abdullah awoke and seizing a knife laid hold of Ruhainah's neck.

"Stay!" cried Bernard, arresting the old man's hand and gently placing it on the pillow.

"You would not kill me, father dear?" said Ruhainah as she kissed his forehead. "Ruhainah loves you as much as ever."

"No!—you do not understand!—cut it!—open it!—it is all there!" he ejaculated.

"He is delirious," said Bernard. "We must watch him."

"My father, what is it?" asked Ruhainah as she kneeled before him.

"Open the talisman on your neck!" he exclaimed.

Ruhainah removed the old leathern talisman which she had worn from her earliest childhood, and handed it to Bernard, who hastily cut it open. There fell on the cot a few leaves from a small Book of Common Prayer, a miniature portrait, and a lock of deep auburn hair the very color of Ruhainah's. Opening the leaves of the little prayer book he read on the first page the name of "*Lydia Churton*," and in the portrait he detected an unmistakable resemblance to the devoted girl whose beautiful Christian character had so influenced his life. "*Churton!*" Why, that was the name of Sister Lydia's father. Beyond doubt the mysterious

Maid of Herat was none other than Lydia's sister.

Ruhainah again took the old chief's hand, the very hand that seventeen years ago had slain her father, and turning to Bernard she pleadingly said :

"O sir, is it really true? My father is delirious, it is impossible? It cannot be true? This hand could never have slain my father?"

"Ruhainah, it *is* true—it is all true—I know your sister, she is still living," said Bernard with great tenderness; "trust me, and all will be well."

"Abdullah!" said Bernard, rousing the dying chieftain to consciousness. "Abdullah! do you know where Ruhainah's mother died?"

"She died in Cabul."

"Was she killed?"

"No, she died of fever."

"Where was she buried?"

"I do not know."

"Did you ever see her?"

"No, but Hasan the Khyberee had been the captain's orderly."

"Where was her father buried?"

"I buried him with my own hands outside the Ziyārat at Jagdalak."

"Can I find the grave?"

"Yes. It is covered with a large stone on which there is the sign of the cross. Moslems hate the cross, but I made it for Ruhainah's sake. Ruhainah's father was a Christian."

"O father, I am still your child!" Ruhainah pleaded. "I am still your child! O my father, do not leave me."

"Forgive me, Ruhainah! I did the deed in self-defence. God knows I did. But I have tried to do with you even that which is right."

"Indeed you have, you dear old saint, and if you will only live no other being in this world shall claim Ruhainah as his own."

"Ruhainah! kiss me once more. Now listen! I am dying—when I am dead do as the major wishes you, for you will not be safe in this country, you must be under the foreigner's protection."

"Sir," said Bernard taking Ruhainah's hand, "give us your blessing."

Abdullah raised both his hands, and placing his right hand on Bernard's head and his left

on Ruhainah's, in broken accents said—"The God—of Abraham—of Ishmael—of Mohamed—bless you!"

"Alak," he continued, "you must spare the foreigner's life. Moses demanded a life for a life—Jesus enjoined forgiveness—but our Prophet (upon whom be peace), allowed compensation. Your compensation, Alak, is the blood of Ruhainah's father."

Alak stepped forward and presented the hilt of his sword to Bernard and with great emotion said, "Major, I now swear to protect you, for I love my father, and if you will not consider it presumption I tell you I love Ruhainah as few Afghans love their sisters. I have always said she was too good for this country."

The excitement of the conversation completely exhausted the dying man, and he lay in a state of stupor, as Ruhainah bathed his feverish forehead with rich perfumes. In the meantime the four wives entered the chamber wailing in loud lamentation.

"Leave the place!" said Alak to the Sheenwaree wife. "This is all your doing."

"Alak!" said his mother with dignity, "this

is not the time, nor the place, for a strife of words. You will soon be chief of Abukilla and then justice can be done. Till then let Nurejan stay."

"Carry the Rustum of Herat into the guest-chamber!" said Alak, "for it has never been that the chief of our tribe dies in the seclusion of the harem."

And the cot on which the dying chieftain lay was carried forth amid the frantic cries of the women of the household.

Ruhainah stood speechless as she beheld her faithful guardian of seventeen years borne away from her. But as Bernard's eyes met those of the lovely maid, he whispered, "Ruhainah, when all is over I must see you. Trust me. I will be to you all, and even more, than the good old man ever was."

In the hujrah of the fort a large concourse of people assembled round the couch of the dying chieftain, and, as the old man wrestled with the angel of death, Mullah Ahmad the priest endeavored to smooth the rough passage by reciting verses from the Koran:

"Verily the sons of paradise shall be in pos-

session of eternal joy. They shall have fruits and all their soul's desire. Even peace as a message of mercy from a merciful God ! ”

Then turning the dying man's face toward Mecca, the priest slowly and solemnly recited :—

“ Every soul must taste of death, but ye shall be rewarded in the last day.”

“ He speaks ! ” said Bernard as the old man's lips moved. Alak listened.

“ Yes, he calls for *Ruhainah*.”

“ No,” said the priest. “ The Rustum of Herat dies as a faithful Moslem should die. He commits the soul to the keeping of the Almighty, his last words are ‘ *Ar-raheem*,’ ‘ the Merciful.’ He trusts in the mercy of his God.”

“ Peace ! ” said the village doctor, “ the angel of death has departed. Abdullah is dead.”

CHAPTER XVII.

LOVE'S QUESTIONS.

“**A**BDULLAH the Rustum of Herat is dead, henceforth let all men acknowledge Alak as the chief of Abukilla,” said Ahmad the priest as he bound the turban of the departed chieftain round the son’s head.

The body of the chief, amid the loud lamentation of his friends, was borne from the guest-house to the harem, for the ceremonial ablution.

“Stay!” cried the priest; “coffin him in his blood, for is it not written the blood of the martyr appeareth white as crystal before the throne of God?”

Meanwhile Major Bernard retired to his upper chamber, and anxiously awaited the arrival of Ruhainah.

Rapping at the door Gulandamah the slave girl said, “My mistress is waiting without.” Bernard opening the door gently beckoned to

Ruhainah to enter as she stood hesitatingly on the threshold of his room.

“ Be seated, Ruhainah ! do not be afraid of me. My one desire is to be of service to you, my little rose,” he said, as he took her hand with warm affection.

Ruhainah modestly and timidly seated herself on the ground, when Bernard tenderly raised her to his couch. “ No ! my queen, you must not sit on the ground, that is *my* place, not yours.”

“ How good and true he is ! ” whispered Gulandamah who had never witnessed such gallantry to her sex before.

“ Silence ! ” said Ruhainah, “ this is not the time for trifling ! ” as with downcast eyes she waited for Bernard to speak.

“ Ruhainah ! ” he said, looking tenderly and speaking most feelingly to her. “ Ruhainah ! you must realize your position. The story which your guardian ”—(“ my *father* ! ” she said)—“ the story which your kind protector told us is true. You are the daughter of an English officer, Captain Churton, who was killed in the Cabul war. Your mother is dead.

She died of fever in the city of Cabul. You have a sister living whose name is Lydia. I know your sister. She took care of me during a severe illness last year. She is in London. She is about six years older than you are. She is very beautiful and very good."

"Oh, it is all like a dream," she said, as she put her hand to her head in a state of bewilderment. "It is all so strange.—Do you love my sister?"

"Ruhainah! you ask me if I *love* your sister. Yes, I do love her, but not as I love you," he said as he fondly played with her little hands. "O Ruhainah, I have never in the whole course of my life loved anything in this world as I love you. You are very like your sister, but you are more beautiful. Believe me, my little bright rose of the desert, I love you as truly and as passionately as it is possible for a man to love a woman. I have seen hundreds, ah! thousands of beautiful women, but I have never seen any one so sweet, so lovely as you."

Ruhainah was silent. She did not even look at Bernard, but she nervously seized the side

of the couch and grasped it convulsively as in great terror, for Gulandamah had left and they were quite alone.

"Ruhainah ! Ruhainah !" pleaded Bernard, "do not be afraid of me, but speak ? O ! tell me do you *really* love me ?"

"How many wives have you ?" inquired Ruhainah innocently.

Bernard laughed. "My little dove, we English only marry one wife. But *do* tell me if you love me ?"

"You know all," she softly whispered as she placed her head on his shoulder and thrust her little fingers in his long beard, even as she used to do to her old Afghan father.

"What do I *know* ?" he asked coaxingly.

"Why ! Afghan girls of my position do not rush into the room of a man, as I did the other night, both unveiled and unprotected ! If my dear father had seen me, much as he loved me, he would have killed me on the spot, but

Prudence sets great store by name and fame,
Love casteth both away,"

and she raised her soft dreamy loving eyes

and fixed them on Bernard as she softly repeated, "Love casteth *all* away."

"You are an angel!" said Bernard as he folded her in his strong arms and covered her with kisses. "But come, Ruhainah! No time must be lost. We must act at once; you must escape with me, for now the good old chief is dead, neither your life nor mine is safe for a single hour. "We must be married by a Moslem priest, for there is no other. Do you consent to be married to me, Ruhainah, when the funeral is over?"

"Why do you ask me? love casteth *all* away," she said as she clung fondly to him and imprinted one passionate kiss upon his lips. The first she had given to any mortal man save to her old Afghan father.

Major Bernard led her to the door and requested Gulandamah the slave girl, who had been listening without, to call Mullah Ahmad the priest. He was soon seated in Bernard's presence.

"You know the secret imparted to me by the dying chieftain," he said addressing the priest. "Ruhainah, his reputed daughter, is an

Englishwoman, and she has been placed under my protection, both by the deceased governor of this fort, and by his son, who succeeds him. I have decided to marry the young lady, and to take her away from here as my wife. Now, can you, as a Mohamedan priest, celebrate the marriage ? ”

“ Yes,” replied Ahmad, “ she is a true Moslem and you are a Nazarene. A marriage between a Moslem and a Nazarene is lawful according to our sacred traditions. If you require proof of this statement I will go to the mosque and produce written authorities.”

“ That is not necessary,” replied Bernard. “ But will you marry us after the funeral of the chief is over ? ”

“ Certainly. A fixed dowry, and two witnesses are all that is necessary—and a *fee*, of course.”

“ Of course,” replied Bernard, “ that can be arranged.”

* * * * *

Bernard, once again alone in his chamber reclining on his couch gave himself up to reflec-

tion on the strange and romantic incidents of the last few days. What prophet, sage, or seer could have foretold such a destiny? By the slaying of Hasan he had virtually accomplished the object of his mission, and he was now about to wed a simple child of nature, one who in every respect, save the accident of her birth, was an Afghan maiden. Then, for a few minutes, his judgment seemed to reason that he had been most indiscreet in choosing for a wife one who, from the peculiar circumstances of her life, could hardly be a fit companion for a man in his position, much less take her place in that circle of society in which he hoped by distinguished service to figure as an officer of high rank. "I have evidently made an ass of myself," he thought; "what will the fellows of my regiment say when they hear of it? What will government say? Why, even Garson (slave as he is to the influences of woman), will say I have made a fool of myself, and no mistake!"

Such were Bernard's thoughts as he surveyed the situation. But soon the beautiful features and bewitching grace of his Ruhainah rose before him, and, as by a magic touch, dispelled

all doubt. "That girl has very strong individuality of character, she has great natural ability, she has a most affectionate nature. What more do I require? She is a true child of nature, and I can train, and mold, and educate her to my own heart's desire."

And Bernard reveled in the thought of what his Ruhainah might become under the refining influences of her sister's teaching. Her strong attachment to the old Afghan chief; the determination with which she had saved him from the poisoned dish; the resolute manner in which she held the revolver as she expected an attack; the plucky way she had mounted his charger and ridden home, combined with her natural modesty and elegant grace; had all a great fascination for a soldier of Bernard's character, and experience. "My darling girl!" he exclaimed to himself, "my own precious treasure, we shall be *very*, *very* happy and no evil genius shall rob me for a moment of the confidence I feel in making you my own little wife."

* * * * *

But Ruhainah had no such misgivings. She

felt she loved Bernard with a passionate love such as her heart had hitherto been a stranger to. She used to think she could never love any one but her dear old father, but now the foreigner had so completely taken possession of her whole being that she could not even realize that her faithful and loving guardian was no more. It was for Bernard she had risked her honor and her life, and now she could, without one single thought of doubt or mistrust, give him her whole heart. Trust him? of course she would "*trust*" him, although she knew absolutely nothing of her future.

"O loved one!" she exclaimed as she looked in the direction of Bernard's chamber, "O loved one! I am but a poor little wild flower of the desert, but touch me with thy wizard hand and I will bloom and blossom for thy dear sake. Like a poor dervish will I sit silently at thy feet, and as a devoted pilgrim will I follow thee to the world's end. I am but a disciple, but thou art my *murshid*; guide me on my way. Nay thou art my *kibla* of devotion to which this poor fluttering heart instinctively turns. I am thine."

* * * * *

Softly and silently did Ruhainah enter the chamber of death where lay stretched in rigid stillness the shrouded corpse of the old chieftain. Raising the white sheet which covered it, she gazed on the placid features of her faithful guardian, and placing her feverish hand on his cold forehead said, O my *dear, dear* old father, where in this world shall I find love as true as thine? How thou didst play with me as a little child! How gently and lovingly did those lips always speak to me, thou brave old warrior! Thou art now at rest, my father, my dear father—and yet they say thou art not my father. Oh is it possible that that arm killed my father? Oh no, I cannot hate thee.” Then raising the sleeve of his left arm she beheld the scar her own father had inflicted. “O merciful God, forgive them both!” she said and raising her hands in supplication she sunk in an agony of uncontrolled grief on the lifeless corpse of the Rustum of Herat.

“Don’t cry, Ruhainah!” said Alak, as he approached her and tenderly raised her from

his father's cot. "You must not cry in this way. It is God's will. Ruhainah! my father loved you more than he loved any of us. His last dying word was '*Ruhainah*'."

"O, Alak," she said, "wherever I go I shall always think of you as my brother. You have been very kind to me."

"No, Ruhainah! when you leave us you will learn to hate us and despise us even as all your race do."

"No, Alak! I never shall, nor will the Major Sahib, for he loves your race. Remember, Alak, the major risked his life twice. Once in avenging the death of his *Afghan* friend, and again in saving me, whom he regarded simply as an *Afghan* girl, and as *your sister*! No, Alak, my brother! we shall never hate nor despise the *Afghans*.

"But, O, Alak!" she pleaded, placing her hand on his shoulder, "O, Alak, *do* give up your desperate life."

"Yes, Ruhainah, I will, if you will stay with us. But when my good angel has departed, the devil will have it all his own way."

“But you will try to do better, won’t you, Alak, for Ruhainah’s sake?”

“Yes, I will *try*. But remember the death of my father must be avenged. There must be more bloodshed yet.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

EARTH TO EARTH.

THE soiled garments, the tearful eyes, and the stealthy steps of Abdullah's household gave a sombre aspect to the old mud fort, as friends and neighbors entered the gateway, in straggling companies, to attend the funeral of the brave old chieftain.

Alak sat in the court-yard to receive the people, as each in turn offered condolence to the bereaved son.

"Your father was a brave man," said a gray-bearded chieftain. "We fought together in the Cabul war, and many a proud foreigner fell beneath his sword."

"The Rustum of Herat was ever ready to feed the poor," said a poor ragged priest. "No one was ever sent away empty from the gate of this fort."

"You must submit to the will of God," said

a venerable man as he seized Alak's hand. "Resignation is the evidence of true faith. We shall all soon pass through the grave to the paradise above."

"Or slip over the bridge Sirat," said Shahbaz the jester.

"Ah," said Mullah Ahmad the priest, "it has been well said in the Book, 'Verily, we are God's, and to Him shall we return.' There was not a more devout man than your father to be found in the Moslem world. Five times daily did he pray; right truly did he fast in the sacred month; he gave tithes of his goods; he made the pilgrimage to the sacred city on foot; and now, fortified by the faith of Islam, he will get easily over the narrow bridge and have a joyful entrance into the courts of paradise."

"Let us pray for the repose of his soul!" said Alak. And every hand was raised in silent supplication.

The wailing lamentations of the women within the harem intimated that the time had come when the chieftain's corpse must be carried forth to burial.

“Carry the dead quick to his grave,” said the Prophet of Arabia, “for if he be an evil doer the sooner you get rid of him the better, and if he be a saint, why keep him out of paradise?” And so they bore the corpse of the chief of Abukilla quickly to his last home. On a green sward outside the burial ground they arranged themselves in five rows facing the body of the deceased, and Alak, as the next of kin, called out, “Let the prayers begin.”

The priest, taking his position, faced the head of the corpse, and in solemn plaintive strains, recited :—

“God is great !

“O, God, Thou art holy !

“Praise be to Thee !

“Great is Thy name !

“Great is Thy power !

“Great is Thy praise !

“There is no God but Thee !

“O God, forgive our living and our dead, those who are present and those who are absent, our men, our women, and our children. Keep us all in the faith of Islam !”

Saluting the good angel on his right the priest said :

“ Peace and mercy be on thee ! ”

And extending the same courtesy to the evil angel on the left :

“ Peace and mercy be on thee. ”

“ The prayers are over,” said Alak. And large trays of food were distributed to the poor, as the friends and neighbors pressed forward to offer consolation to the sorrowing son.

Only a few of the deceased's nearest relatives carried the body to the grave, and Alak and Akbar, the faithful slave, gently raised the shrouded figure and placed it in the niche at the bottom of the grave.

“ From earth God created you and to earth does He call you back, and from the earth will He raise you at the last day,” exclaimed Akbar the slave as he loosened the shroud and filled up the recess which contained all that was mortal of the Afghan warrior.

Bernard stood at some distance from the spot, and watched the solemn service with intense interest. The service over and the grave closed, Major Bernard accompanied Alak to the

fort. Having walked some forty paces Alak stopped, and devoutly raised his hands in prayer.

"For whom are you praying?" inquired Bernard.

"For the poor old man," whispered Alak; "for now it is that those two angels of fearful countenances are making him sit up in his grave and are putting him through an examination."

"Never fear," said Bernard with a suppressed smile, "your good and benevolent father will get through it all right."

"I am not certain of that," replied Alak solemnly, "for I must tell you that Abdullah of Herat had done many a dark deed."

"Surely," said Bernard, "his generous treatment of Ruhainah will atone for a few misdeeds."

"Yes, I believe it will. Ruhainah wants me to reform and to follow in my father's footsteps, and I believe I shall. The Rustum of Herat for many years lived the violent life of an Afghan soldier, but he died the death of a martyred saint."

CHAPTER XIX.

IS IT LAWFUL?

THE fort of Abukilla was no longer a place of safety for either Bernard or Ruhainah. But a serious difficulty presented itself. Would "Sister Lydia," who had strict views regarding such questions, recognize a Moslem marriage?

Major Bernard would have given much to have got within telegraphic communication with some legal authority on the subject, for great as was his love, the passionate love he bore for the fair girl who had so enslaved his heart, he felt how important it was for her future that their marriage should be perfectly legal. "Sister Lydia" with her strong religious feelings would never forgive him if it were otherwise.

To consult Ruhainah on such a question was useless, and the Moslem priest had already given his legal opinion from his own standpoint.

"Necessity knows no law," said Bernard to himself, as he thought over the subject; "it must be done; for, apart from my own feelings, the safety of one of my own countrywomen depends upon the marriage. Ruhainah can leave this place only as my wife."

"You say you can perform a legal marriage between Ruhainah and myself?" said Bernard to the priest, who had just entered the room.

"All that is necessary," replied the learned man, "is the consent of both parties, a dowry, and two witnesses."

"And a *fee*? I think you said?"

"Yes, and a *fee*, that is an important consideration in the legality of a marriage," said Ahmad with feigned solemnity, as his eyes twinkled with a roguish smile.

As they were discussing the subject, Alak entered the chamber quickly followed by Ruhainah and her slave girl. Bernard requested the priest to proceed with the ceremony without delay.

"We shall require *two* witnesses!" said the priest.

"You have two, here are Alak and Gulandamah," said Bernard.

"Women only count as half," said the learned man. "There must be two women and one man."

Alak called his mother.

"But this is not right," said the priest. "Gulandamah is a slave and legally counts for only half a woman."

Alak summoned Akbar.

"But Akbar is a slave and only counts for half a man," said the priest.

Bernard became impatient. "Come, my learned friend, I think you have enough, however call Shahbaz the jester to make sure."

"Now for the dowry," said the priest.

"With all my worldly goods I thee endow," said Bernard translating from his English prayer book.

"That won't do," said the priest. "You must mention a specified sum."

"Put down the largest possible sum," replied Bernard, much amused at the priest's persistency.

"Well, then, say one *kintār*."

"How much is that?"

"The learned say it is as much gold as you can put into a cowhide."

"She is worth that," said Bernard pressing Ruhainah's hand tenderly. "Say two *kintārs*."

"Do you consent?"

"I consent! I consent! I consent!" repeated Bernard with such fervor as excited the amusement of the witnesses, for he remembered the formula used at Shaidy's wedding.

Ruhainah was silent.

"Say, yes, my little rose," said Bernard.

"She is afraid," said Gulandamah, "she wants to say it, but she can't."

But Bernard felt she said it with her eyes.

"Silence gives consent by all the legal decisions of our law," said the priest solemnly; "if you want authority for this I can quote it."

"Proceed, Mullah Ahmad, I am fully convinced of your probity and learning in such matters."

The priest, turning to the witnesses, said in measured tones:—

"I declare the foreigner named Bernard, and Ruhainah, the reputed daughter of Abdullah,

upon whom the aforesaid foreigner has fixed a dowry of two kintars, to be man and wife. *Ameen.*"

"*Ameen !*" exclaimed Gulandamah ; and all the witnesses said *Ameen !*

"What next !" inquired Bernard, observing that the priest hesitated.

"That is all that is *absolutely* necessary.—But let us pray," and the priest raised his hands in supplication :—

"O great God! grant that mutual love may reign between these two persons, even as it did exist between Adam and Eve, and Abraham and Sarah, Joseph and—"

"Stop," said Bernard. "With your permission, reverend sir, we will finish the prayer in London," and he placed in the good man's hand a liberal fee.

"Anyhow," said Alak, "you are man and wife and I give you my blessing. I always thought Ruhainah was too good for us wild Afghans."

* * * * *

The wedding over, Major Bernard at once

proceeded to arrange for his departure, and sent for Nand Ram the shopkeeper, as one best acquainted with the requirements of the journey.

"You old villain," he said, as he seized the Hindu by the ear, "you are of a truth the biggest traitor I have met even in this country."

"Don't say that, Major Sahib, for did you not find your horse ready saddled even as I promised?"

"True. But why would you not allow me to reveal the plot?"

"O honored sir! what is more precious even to a Hindu banker than his life? Had I revealed the plot, why this polluted spirit of mine would now be animating the foul carcass of one of the lower animals of creation. A dog! or a donkey!—"

"Or a snake!" added Bernard.

"Be grateful, my dear sir, to your poor slave, Nand Ram, for had he not saddled your horse and revealed the plot, you would not now be in possession of the Fair Maid of Herat."

"But you have sacrificed the life of your noble patron."

"I gave him a quick passage to paradise. Abdullah of Herat had done many a violent deed, but he died like a martyr and was buried like a saint; and now there will be a shrine erected on his grave, and in ages to come miracles will be wrought at the martyr's tomb!" And the old Hindu chuckled as he contemplated the canonization of the Rustum of Herat!

"Major Sahib!" he continued, "people never give Nand Ram credit for a single good deed. But just you think of what I have accomplished. Musa, the Sheenwaree tyrant, has been slain; the old sinner who ruled this fort has been made a martyred saint; you have got possession of the most beautiful girl in the whole country; and the coffers of your humble servant have been vastly enriched," and the oily old scoundrel placed his hand upon his breast, and bowed with abject submission. "What are your commands, most noble sir?"

A covered litter on a camel was arranged for, and the banker undertook to supply bills of credit upon Cabul and other cities on the way, for he was well known in mercantile circles as a

man of great wealth. Bernard decided to start for Cabul that very night.

* * * * *

"Bertram!" for she had soon learned his name, "Bertram!" said Ruhainah, "do let me visit the grave of my father, and say farewell to my little sister Shaidy before we leave."

"It is impossible, my darling. Every moment's delay is dangerous. And remember, Ruhainah, my own little wife, your father's grave is in the Jagdalak Pass, and your sister is in London."

"Bertram! you are angry with me. But I tell you, I must then have two fathers, for neither time nor even your devoted love shall ever efface from my memory the recollection of my dear old father, the Rustum of Herat."

"Ruhainah, my noble wife! I am not angry with you, and I will promise with this kiss" (and he folded her fondly in his arms), "I will promise henceforth that whatever happens, as long as I live, we will honor and revere the memory of the brave old Afghan, who, for

seventeen years, loved you with even more than a father's love."

"Then, Bertram," she said, looking sweetly in his face, "we shall never quarrel."

"You are a brave, honest girl, and I am quite certain I do not even now realize what a treasure God has given me."

"Oh, Bertram, I am *so* ignorant. But you will teach me, won't you? Tell me more of God, and about His Prophet (upon whom be peace), and teach me to read the blessed Koran."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Bernard to himself, "what would Sister Lydia say to this?"

"Ruhainah, my good little wife, do you not remember that your dear old father always said he had dedicated you to 'the Prophet Jesus'?"

"Upon whom be peace!" said Ruhainah, shocked at the careless way in which Bernard uttered the sacred name.

"Now your Sister Lydia is a disciple of the Lord Jesus, and she will instruct you in the way more perfectly than I can."

"But *you* must teach me. I want to learn

that religion which has made you so good, and so noble, and so brave, Bertram!"

"But, my darling, I must tell you that even I had to learn the road to God from Sister Lydia's lips. Ruhainah, my precious treasure! I will teach you one sentence Sister Lydia taught me. Now, you won't forget it, will you?" And he gently caressed her and smoothed her beautiful tresses.

"I will never forget anything you tell me, Bertram," she said, raising her eyes to his in trustful confidence.

"Well, then, the words are these, 'We walk by faith and not by sight'."

"But what is *faith*?"

"Ruhainah," he said solemnly, "you have trusted yourself to me, and I am now going to lead you forth into a great wide world you have never seen——*that is faith.*"

"Yes, Bertram, I think I understand you. So will I trust God."

* * * * *

Having arranged with Nand Ram for a special messenger to Peshawur Major Bernard wrote

a hurried letter to Captain Garson, the major of brigade, explaining that circumstances had compelled him to proceed to Cabul and that he would return to England by the way of Herat and Meshed. But enclosed was a more lengthy note for Ruhainah's sister.

“FORT ABUKILLA, Jan. 26, 1860.

“MY DEAR SISTER LYDIA, for I believe I can now claim you as *my sister*, it has often been said that ‘truth is stranger than fiction’. I came to this out-of-the-way place in the Afghan hills expecting an untimely, or a timely, grave. But I have found a wife instead. Yes, a wife! And that wife is none other than your *sister*. Your father, Captain Churton, was killed in the Jagdalak Pass on Jan. 12, 1842, and your dear mother, Lydia Churton, it appears, died of fever in Cabul sometime previous. They left a little babe six months old. This infant's life was saved by a fine Afghan chieftain named Abdullah. He took the child to Herat and resided there, and only about a year ago came to this place. It was here that I discovered your sister. Round her neck was a talisman containing your mother's portrait—a lock of

auburn hair and a few pages from the Book of Common Prayer, on one of which was written, evidently by your father's hand, your mother's name. Ruhainah, for that is your sister's name, (for I cannot find that she has been baptized), is a beautiful creature, a real child of nature, as pure in thought and life as the very mountain air she breathes.

“She is very pretty and very graceful. She has long tresses of deep auburn hair, the very color of your mother's, the most captivating eyes I have ever gazed upon, and her disposition is simply lovely. The devotion she shows for the old Afghan chief, whom she had for seventeen years regarded as her father, is a sort of thing one doesn't meet with in this unromantic age. The poor old chief is dead, or I really believe Ruhainah would never leave him, even for me. I could tell you much more, but I have not time, for we are leaving for Cabul at once. The whole story is simply a fairy tale written with God's own finger. I know your first anxiety will be regarding her religious belief. As far as I can discover she has very little. The old chieftain dedicated

her, as he said, 'to the Prophet Jesus,' as he used to speak of the Saviour, and he seems never to have taught her anything regarding his own religion. Ruhainah sends her *salaam*, which is the Oriental expression for sending love, although it really means *peace*. I will write more from Cabul. But till we meet believe me

“Your truly affectionate brother,

“BERTRAM BERNARD.

“P. S. I forgot to tell you that we have been married by a Moslem priest. Is it lawful?”

CHAPTER XX.

WITHOUT THE BENEDICTION.

THREE days of weary travelling — (for Major Bernard had to regulate his speed and that of his mounted escort to the slow measured steps of the stately Bactrian dromedary which bore in regal state his lovely bride and her faithful little maid Gulandamah)—brought them to Gundamak, so celebrated in Afghan history as the scene of the last desperate struggle with the British foe, and, still more recently, of the treaty which ushered in a fourth Afghan war.

Here were yet seen the bleached bones of the English soldiers who fell as the remnant of a vanquished army, and the Afghan captain of the escort related with pardonable pride the fact that of the whole invading force only one Englishman returned to tell the tale. “You call it murder, and assassination, and treachery!”

said the Afghan captain, "but, sir, you must remember that now we are an enfeebled and uncivilized race. But the traditions of our country remind us of the glorious deeds of our armies when led by such generals as Mahmud of Ghuznee and Ahmad Shah. Then it was that we pressed down upon Hindustan as conquerors and held India very much as you do at the present time. Our august master the Ameer Dost Mohamed, is always reminding us that when we become once more united under a leader, the Afghan people will again prove that they are a nation of men. You English have yet to learn this!" the old warrior said with great warmth as he galloped his horse over the ghastly remnant of a once victorious army.

"My friend," said Bernard, "I am very much of your opinion. For I believe there is still a grand destiny in store for your nation."

"The Major Sahib is almost an Afghan himself," exclaimed a voice from the drapery on the dromedary.

It was none other than Gulandamah who

spoke, prompted, as Bernard believed, by the patriotic Maid of Herat.

"You are quite right," said Bernard as he caught the eye of his darling wife peeping through the awning of her somewhat contracted abode on the camel's back. "I am a real Afghan!"

Descending to the bed of a mountain stream, the next day, they arrived at Jagdalak, a formidable defile about two miles in length exceedingly narrow and closed in by lofty hills. It was here that seventeen years ago Ruhainah's father and eleven other British officers were massacred by Afghan soldiers.

Remembering the dying words of Abdullah, Major Bernard and his young wife visited the Ziyarat near the village, and there, true to the old man's words, they found a solitary grave some distance from the cemetery. It was covered with loose pebbles, and across the grave had been hastily thrown a large oblong slab on the face of which Bernard traced the faint outlines of a sign of the cross as it had been roughly and hastily scratched with some sharp pointed weapon. Most probably it was done

with the chieftain's dagger. Perhaps the very dagger with which he had slain Ruhainah's father. The grave was beyond doubt that of Captain Churton.

"My poor father!" exclaimed Ruhainah as she stood over the grave leaning on Bernard's arm. "I never knew him, but look at the sign of the cross. *That* was done by one who loved me as tenderly as a *mother*."

"Yes, Ruhainah, the good old man undoubtedly made that sign, so hateful to Moslems, *for your sake*."

"Let us pray for my English father's soul!" said Ruhainah as she raised her hands in supplication.

"Well! my dear girl, I am not sure that our Christian religion allows that sort of thing. But we will ask Sister Lydia."

Three more days of tedious marching brought them to Cabul, the capital of Afghanistan, where they at once sought the hospitality of the Armenian Christians.

These Armenians occupied quarters in the well known citadel, the Bāla Hisār, where they have been a little community ever since the days

of Nādir Shah, chiefly supporting themselves by the manufacture of wine and spirits.

In the midst of their crowded dwellings, and entirely secluded from public view, was their little church, a sacred edifice, which, although dedicated to Christian worship, had escaped the ravages of successive Mohamedan conquerors, for amid the dynastic changes which have so frequently occurred the Armenians of Cabul have always enjoyed freedom of religious worship.

Old Marcus, the head of the family, received Bernard and Ruhainah with great kindness and affection, for the little community had remembered with gratitude the kind treatment they had received from the British invaders when they held the Cabul capital.

“Yes,” the old man said, as Bernard spoke to him of the death of Ruhainah’s mother, “the dear lady died in this very room. It was two days after the massacre of the British embassy. I and my wife, since dead, were present at her death. Her husband, the captain, was also with us, but he was killed a few weeks afterward in the retreat from Cabul. She was a good

Christian, sir, and often prayed in our little church. Only two days before her death they brought a clergyman, and he baptized their little babe.

“Come to the church, sir, and I will show you the very font in which the child was baptized. That child must surely be the lady I now see before me. It is seventeen years or more since those terrible times.”

Bernard and Ruhainah followed Marcus as he conducted them to the church. It was a small vaulted building lighted from the roof. The dirty whitewashed walls were decorated with numerous colored pictures of the virgin and the saints, and at the east end of the sanctuary was a small altar covered with a richly embroidered cloth worked, as Marcus assured them, by the ladies of his family. On the altar was placed a high wooden cross and six gilt candlesticks. Suspended over the altar was a bright red lamp still burning even at noonday. Before the altar were offerings of flowers, sweetmeats, and talismans, presented by the women, some of whom were still prostrating in the act of devotion.

"Look here!" whispered Marcus, not to disturb the prayers of the devout, "look here, sir, this is the font in which Captain Churton's little girl was baptized," and he showed them a rudely carved stone basin in a deep recess on the south side of the building.

"Did the chaplain leave any written record of the baptism?" inquired Bernard.

"Yes, he wrote something in our service-book, but as none of us can read English we do not understand it."

Bernard opened the old missal, a precious relict of Armenian caligraphy (for it had been written by a scribe on Mount Ararat in the early part of the sixteenth century), and on the last fly-leaf he read:—

"I herewith certify that I baptized Christina, the infant daughter of Edward and Lydia Churton, this 23rd day of December, 1841.

"A. F. GOODMAN,

"Chaplain to the forces."

"December 23rd!" said Bernard, "why, that was the day of the assassination of the embassy; and Ruhainah's mother died on Christmas Day."

Then Ruhainah was not a Moslem, but a baptized Christian, and the marriage of two Christians by a Mohamedan priest could by no possibility be a legal marriage. After all, he and Ruhainah were not really man and wife!

"Marcus, have you any Armenian priest in Cabul? "

"No," said Marcus, "we have not had a priest in Cabul for fifty years. The last time the blessed sacrament was celebrated in this church was by Joseph Wolf, the missionary. A very remarkable man was the '*Great Yusuf*', as we still call him."

"Then how do you get married? "

"Oh, that is all right," replied Marcus, "I went to Persia some years ago and the archbishop of Julfa ordained me deacon, so I can perform the marriages of our people."

"My dear friend," said Bernard, "you are the very man we want. You must marry me to Ruhainah at once, for we have only been married by a Mohamedan priest, and now it is certain that Ruhainah is a Christian, I am afraid our marriage is not lawful."

"Sir, I can celebrate your marriage any hour you wish, but as a deacon I cannot give the benediction," said Marcus, very solemnly.

"Oh, never mind the benediction, friend Marcus, but for heaven's sake marry us as soon as you can, for what will her sister say?"

The service was long and tedious. Not a single word of it was understood by either bride or bridegroom. But there, close to the very spot where, seventeen years ago, Christina Churton had been baptized into the Christian church, she was now, after an eventful life, united in the bonds of holy wedlock. As they rose from their knees "without the benediction," Bernard kissed his wife and said, "After all, the good old chieftain was right, for here it was that you were dedicated to the prophet Jesus."

"Yes," said Ruhainah, "I am a Christian, it is true, but, Bertram, you must teach me. I am the *Tālib* and you are my *Murshid*. Let the *disciple* learn at the feet of her *guide*."

"No, my own precious little darling, I am as ignorant as you are. But your sister has often peeped through the golden gates, and she, if

anyone can, will *guide* you on your way to heaven."

* * * * *

Major Bernard was received very graciously by the Ameer, but requested to make his stay as short as possible. "The strong feeling of antipathy to the English race still exists among my people, and I do not consider your life safe in this city," said his highness at a private interview. And even old Marcus advised them to hasten their departure, for he had heard that Ruhainah's position as the wife of an English officer had already awakened great interest and curiosity among the Cabul princes, for the far famed beauty of the mysterious Maid of Herat had often been the subject of idle gossip at the Cabul court.

But, before they left the city, Bernard requested Marcus to conduct them to the Armenian cemetery, so that Ruhainah might visit her mother's grave. The little cemetery was sadly neglected and still bore evidences of recent desecration, for the crosses on the gravestones had, without one single exception, been de-

stroyed by fanatical Afghans. The grave of Lydia Churton was unmarked save by a low mound of earth, but it was next to that of Georgius, the priest, who had died fifty years ago, and Marcus remembered the spot.

"Ah, madam!" he said, addressing Ruhainah, "it was a sad gloomy day when we placed your dear mother in this grave. We buried her by torch-light as the drums beat the alarm, for the city was in open rebellion."

"Was my father present?" she inquired.

"No, he could not stay; there were only four of us here. There was not one of her own race to shed a tear over her grave at her burial! Ah! those were indeed terrible times for the English. The Lord God of battles forsook your hosts and you were scattered like sheep," he said, addressing Bernard.

"My poor mother!" said Ruhainah, kneeling by the grave, "if no tears were shed over your grave then, a daughter has lived to drop one now. Oh may the compassionate and merciful God help you!"

"You are but a small community," said Bernard, addressing Marcus.

"Very small; not more than thirty souls. But we are treated kindly, for the Ameer's son, Azim, has married one of our Armenian daughters."

"Has she embraced Islam?"

"No, she is still a Christian."

"Bertram!" said Ruhainah, placing her hand lovingly on his shoulder, "tell me, are there many Christians in England?"

"Yes, my little rose, I believe there are, and, thank God, there are no Mohamedans."

"How bitterly you speak of the Moslems. Will no Mohamedans go to Heaven?"

"Darling! you really must not ask me such questions. I know more of Afghan poetry than I do of Christian theology, but we will ask your sister."

"Oh Bertram! I wish you could tell me, for, do you know, I can never be happy in Heaven if my dear father, the Rustum of Herat, is not there."

Bernard smiled at her childish simplicity and fondly kissed her.

"Bertram, listen!" she said, looking straight into his eyes with determination, "you are now

going to take me into a new country and among a strange people, but you must never ask me to forget the old Afghan chieftain," and she rested her head fondly against him and dropped a silent tear.

"Ruhainah, it is indeed true that you are entering on a new existence, and so am I, but always remember this, my sweet little rose of the desert, that when I first loved you it was not as Christina, the child of an English captain, but as Ruhainah, the daughter of an Afghan chief."

THE CONCLUSION.

MY story is told. For the life of Ruhainah, as an Afghan maiden, belongs to history, while that of Christina Bernard, as an English lady, must not yet be written.

Do you ask how I became possessed with such a narrative?

I will tell you.

It was in the spring of 1876, that I was seated under an old yew tree in the pretty village churchyard of Brankling, in the south of England, sketching its quaint old church, when a fine, handsome man, some sixty years of age, with a military bearing, entered the churchyard. His wife, a lady of remarkable grace and beauty, but evidently some years younger, rested fondly on his arm, as they passed along the gravelled walk to a little child's grave on the south side of the church.

The lady knelt at the grave, and seemed to engage in silent prayer. Then rising, she took

from her husband a wreath of primroses, and gently and lovingly placed it on the white marble cross.

When they left the churchyard, I went to the old sexton, who was digging a grave close by, and inquired who the visitors were.

“Why, them be Sir Bertram Bernard and his lady. Very first rate folks, sir. Lor’ bless your soul! they was mighty fond of that ere child, sir. Why, it be just sixteen year come next May since I buried him in this very spot. But whenever Sir Bertram and his lady visits this here place they comes to this youngster’s grave, and puts a lot of flowers on it, and they always gives me a sovereign for a taking a care of it.

“Look here, just you look here,” the old man said, passing over to the little grave, “did you ever in the whole course of your life see such an outlandish name as that?” and he pointed to the cross on which I read:

ABDULLAH,
THE BELOVED SON
OF
CHRISTINA AND BERTRAM BERNARD.

"Abdullah ! Just think of that new fangled name ! But it be just like these gentry folks, sir. They be all giving up all our good old English names, and taking to the French. My name is John, sir, and so was my father's before me. There's no nonsense in a name like mine. 'Scuse me, sir, but the rector's a coming."

As the clergyman came up the pathway, I raised my hat, and inquired who Sir Bertram Bernard was.

"He is one of our most distinguished officers," replied the rector. "He is now a member of the Indian Council, and people say, but one never knows the truth of such stories, that Lady Bernard is the inspiring genius of Lord Beaconsfield's Afghan policy : and that it was Sir Bertram who suggested the 'Scientific Frontier.' Lady Bernard is known as one of the most lovely and fascinating women in London society. If you want to hear Lady Bernard's story, you must step into the rectory, for you see I am not a young man, and I feel the cold."

The rector, who was a genial old gentleman, took me into his snug little study, and there by

a bright fire told me the interesting narrative of "Ruhainah, the Maid of Herat."

"I know the whole country," he said, "for I was an ensign in the Afghan war."

"I thought only one Englishman, Dr. Bryden, lived to tell the tale, and all the rest were massacred?"

"No, there were about eighteen officers and ladies held as hostages, and I was one of them. Having fought my country's battles, I went to Oxford and entered a higher service."

"Have Sir Bertram and his wife received tidings of Alak?"

"Yes, the poor fellow was shot in the Khyber."

"And what became of the sweet little Shaidy?"

"She eloped with Yusuf, and they were both slain by the enraged husband."

"And Gulandamah, the little slave girl?"

"She, of course, obtained her freedom from her mistress before they parted. She became the favorite wife of the commander-in-chief of the Afghan army, who had been himself a slave."

“And is ‘Sister Lydia’ living?’”

“Yes, for some years she devoted herself to the education of her sister, and especially to her religious instruction.”

“But I understood you to say Lady Bernard was a lady of fashion?”

“I said her ladyship was lovely and fascinating, but these qualities are surely not incompatible with true piety.”

THE END.

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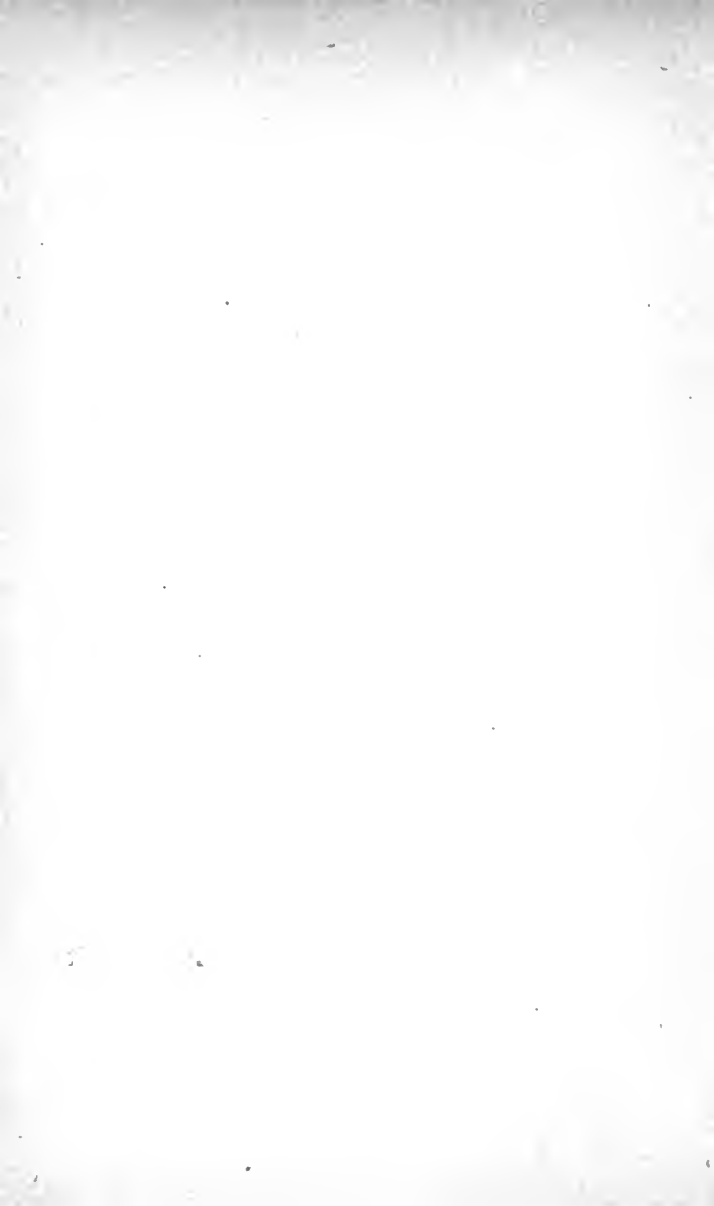
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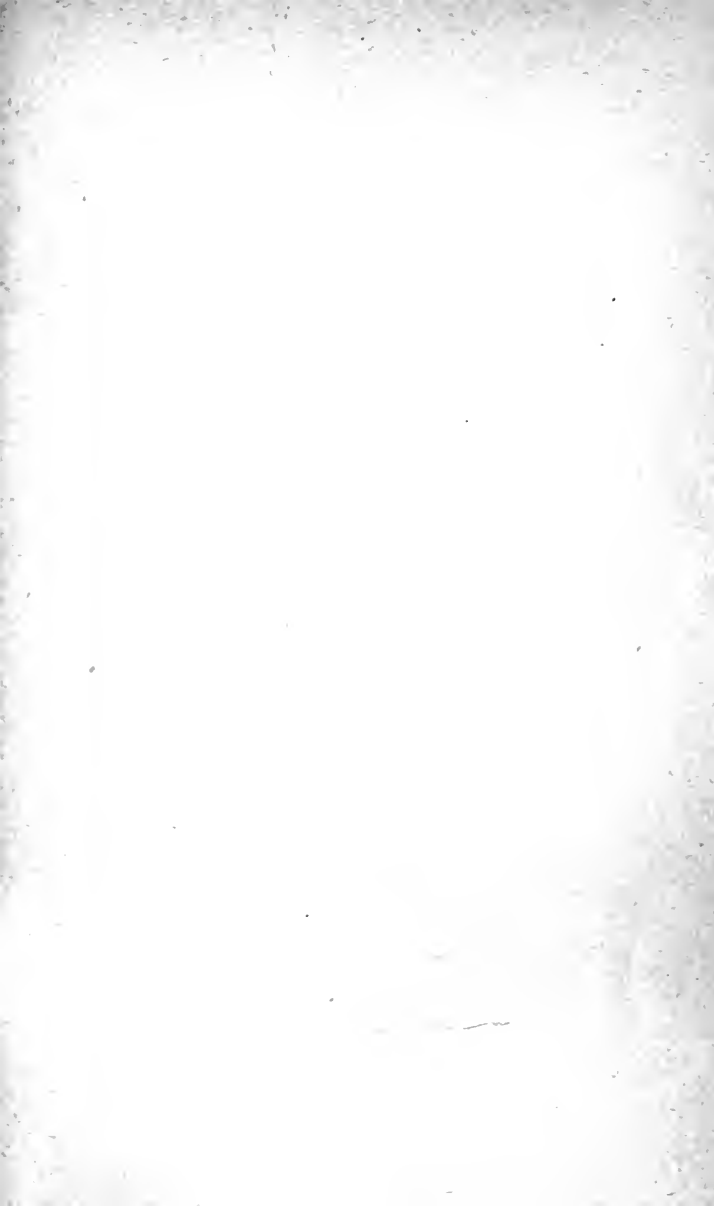
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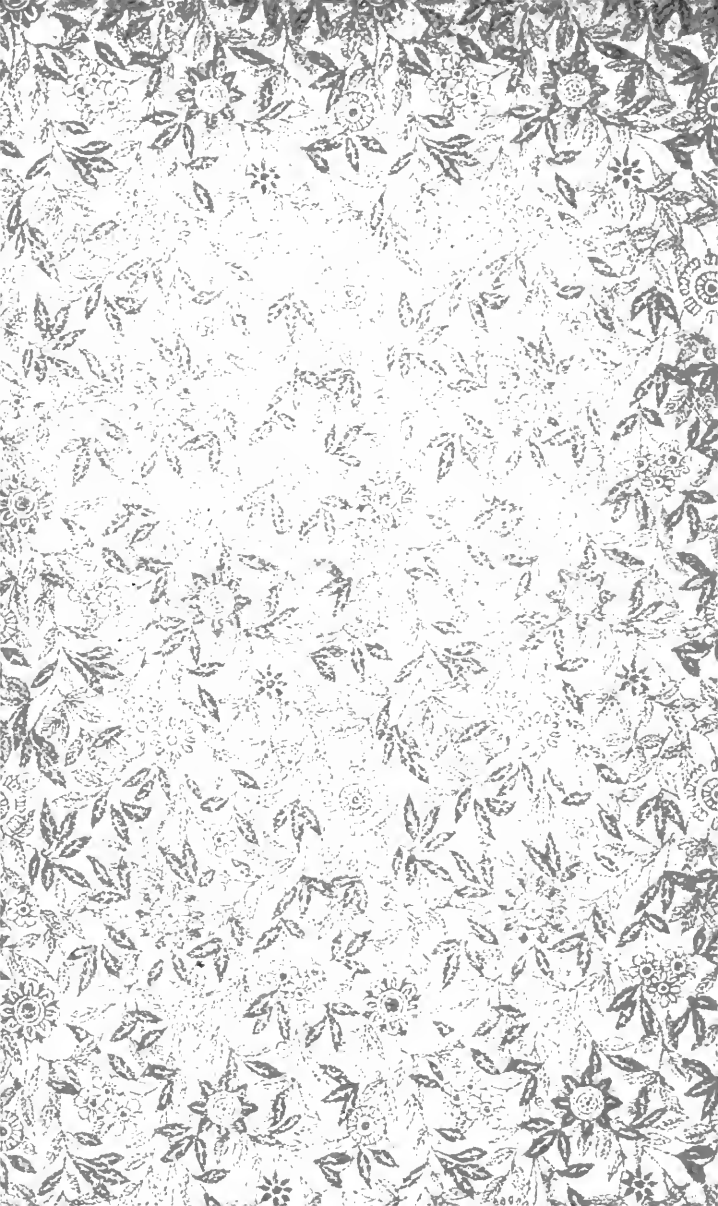
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